THE BLACK ANGELS

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A Novel by

MAUD HART LOVELACE

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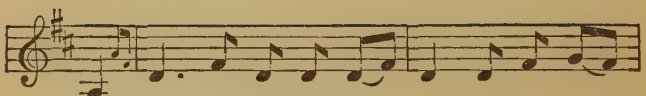
TO MY
FATHER AND MOTHER

About the Author:

MAUD HART LOVELACE was born in 1892 in Mankato, Minnesota. Her father was Thomas W. Hart, for many years the treasurer of his county. There is a legend that the future Mrs. Lovelace began her literary career almost as soon as she could write; and there is still in Mankato a maple tree which formerly housed the young writer's earliest works. At the age of ten she began submitting stories, although the first of these, written, it is said, on a brilliant pink paper, was never heard from. Her first acceptance came at the age of seventeen and she has been contributing to various magazines ever since. She was married during the war to Delos W. Lovelace, the writer, and their home, when they are not traveling north, east, south or west, is on Lake Minnetonka in Minnesota.

The Black Angels is Mrs. Lovelace's first novel but not her first book, for there was published, when the author was nine, a volume of poems. A well-meaning relative served as publisher and the book is now said to be a rarity.

PART ONE



—From *Ossian's Serenade*
OSSIAN E. DODGE

I

THEY were called the black Angels when they lived at the curve of the cradled Minnesota. This was curious, for the singing master himself was very fair. A poll of thinning light hair topped his tall stooping figure, and his eyes were a clear pale blue. When he sat by the fire of an evening, bent over his tuning fork, his eyes had the look of Scottish skies.

He came from Scotland, had straggled down from Canada with the Selkirk refugees in the days when the Falls of St. Anthony sang their music to the Indians alone. For some years he had squatted on the reservation at Fort Snelling. Its limestone towers already crowned the bluffs which look down on the Mississippi and the Minnesota meeting. The military, lonely in the wilderness, permitted these homeless Scotch and Swiss to fence in farms and to pasture their cattle on the river bottoms. Wild strawberries could be had for the picking; buffalo meat could be bought from the Indians. Roger Angel was well content. Benjy and Joseph were born there.

But they were evicted at last—to his hurt bewilderment. They took refuge near the infamous cabin of Pierre Parrant, that Parrant for whom

the little settlement of traders, trappers and half-breed rivermen later was dubbed Pig's Eye. Later still it was named St. Paul for Father Galtier's chapel. Roger Angel lived there through the 'forties, until at Traverse des Sioux the Indians yielded to their pale-faced brothers the lands westward of the Mississippi. Then with his wife and children he followed the Minnesota, a shining trail between its hills, and staked out his claim where the river turns.

There is a story told of him during those early days at Cloudman. That was the new village—a dozen log cabins in a clearing. The settlers were fearful of wolves and homesick Sioux, and had purchased some horns, brought by steamboat up the Mississippi. These were distributed among the various families to be blown when needful as signals of distress, to be held sacred to that usage.

But Roger Angel thirsted for the gay blare of his horn. He longed as David's flesh longed, in a dry and thirsty land where no water was. He could make music with it; he knew he could make music. This was before he had a cow to sell for a melodeon.

One day he yielded to temptation. He let himself down into the hole beneath the cabin. He stuffed the opening with blankets, Fanny helping him. Trembling with joy, he lifted the horn to his lips. At first, the ecstatic shortness of his breath would not let him make a sound. But softly, then exultantly, he pushed forth a silver note. Throwing caution to

the winds he began experimentation, deliciously achieved staccati . . .

The staccati did it. Dropping plow handles and axes, jumping stumps and dodging trees, white with that dread which only pioneers know, his neighbors ran to rescue. Fanny, spilling mirth, rolled under the bed. They found Old Roger—he was not quite Old Roger then, and not yet singing-master to the Minnesota Valley—sitting sheepish on a salt keg.

"Forgie me, laddies. It was only for a bit o' the music. . . ."

He was Scotch to his accent, Old Roger Angel. It was not from him that the brood of seven, growing up about him in Cloudman, derived their flashing black look.

Rumor said that Mrs. Angel had Indian blood. Roger said that his wife was of French extraction. Both may have spoken truly. Since Frenchmen first took pelts from Minnesota forests and voyageurs went singing down Minnesota rivers, there have been *bois brûlés* in Minnesota. She mingled little with the Cloudman women, leaving to Fanny the amenities of village life, but she was a good wife and a good mother and was valued at her true worth by that hard-laboring community.

She was dark and square and silent, and she had what Roger lacked, a strange unemotional affinity with this land where they made their home. Whether she was cooking over the open fire or weav-

ing in the doorway, picking wild plums on the hills or plucking a passenger pigeon which Joseph had shot from the low-flying armies that darkened the sky spring and fall, she was in harmony always with her task and her surroundings. She differed in this from her neighbors, transplanted New England women, who endured with a valiant but ever-alien spirit the rigors of life in the valley. Hot, mosquito-ridden summers, interminable snow-enveloped winters, alike failed to trouble the mother of the Angels. She seemed to draw serenity into her thick-set body from the blue-green earth itself.

She was neither friendly nor unfriendly with the Indians who came to the cabin, favoring the Angels, as they favored all the settlers, with occasional erratic visits. Restive on their reservations, lonely for their old loved camping-grounds, the Dakotas drifted back to the fringes of the towns. If doors were left unlocked to them and householders showed no fear, they were harmless enough as a rule.

They entered a house without knocking, had been known to sample the morning's baking uninvited, and were given to sitting all day in a corner, staring like stolid children. In the evening they looked in at windows. Their bead-bright eyes gazed tirelessly into the candle-lighted kitchens, gazed with unflagging and not unkindly interest at the curious usurpers of their lands. Sometimes in bitter weather they stole in to sleep on the hearthstones; they stole

out again before dawn; and so noiseless were their movements that their visits went unknown unless they left presents of game.

They liked Mrs. Angel's corn bread, licked the crumbs from their fingers with relish. And they liked little Jenny Lind Angel who stood on the kitchen table to sing "Sweet Lilly Dale" as she had heard Fanny sing it.

"Oh! Lilly, sweet Lilly, dear Lilly Dale,
Now the wild rose blossoms o'er her little green grave,
'Neath the trees in the flowery vale."

Impishly delighted when white women and children were afraid of them, the braves were amusedly admiring when these feeble ones failed to be alarmed, and Jenny Lind laughed and clapped her small hands at sight of their gaudy blankets. One day she stumbled on them in pursuit of some Ojibways, painted to their eyebrows with a hideous vermilion.

"Pretty—pretty—pretty——" she chirped, dancing about and pointing to their faces.

She was charmed, and so were they.

Jenny Lind's love of bright hues was shared by her brothers and sisters. It made them a colorful crew even in homespun. A wild tiger-lily in the cap, a tanager's feather in the bootleg—there went a young Angel, more surely if he were singing. Color love and their black hair and eyes they had from

their mother, also a slight broadness of cheekbone, perhaps. Otherwise they were quite unlike her, sparkling one and all with undimmable vivacity.

Benjy, Steve, Timmie and Tommie, twins and young whistling demons—not one partook even slightly of Mrs. Angel's square stolidity, not even Joseph, who didn't know one note from another, who couldn't sing any more than a crow. Even Joseph was tall and pictorialiy slender and full of unruly mirth.

Fanny was short, but too slight to make a shadow. Such twinkling wrists and ankles! Not sixteen inches in her waistline! She moved about flutteringly in her hoops of home manufacture, and her smile fluttered, too, as if uncertain where to light. How to choose among the tiny black moles which were as attractive in her small dark face as markings in a pansy! A fetching one by her eye, but how about that other at the corner of her honeysuckle mouth? Jenny Lind, the baby, was a miniature of Fanny, even to the moles, even to the rings swinging blithely in her ears.

Rumors of Indian blood did the young Angels no discredit in the village. With their gay ways and lovely voices they were far too popular for that. And they had grown up with Cloudman which made them of its aristocracy. The mud-chinked, dirt-floored cabin had been plastered and covered with siding. Old Roger had become the much-respected singing-master, and wore a paper collar like the parson's.

It was common talk that David John, who came from the finest stock in Vermont, from a long line of ministers, though he himself followed the law—it was common talk that David John sighed after Fanny. And Cloudman approved. Half the success of Old Roger's singing-school was acknowledged to be the sextette of mellow voices which he brought from his own hearth.

II

THEY were trailing through the dark to singing school when Benjy resolved to lay before hi father the plan which he and Steve had cherishe secretly so long.

It had been a spring-expectant day—rime on th twigs and roof tops in the morning, streams of melte snow tumbling down the hills by noon and a sk of glorious cloud-tossed blue arching across th muddy valley. Children had gone on hunts for pussy willows. Men, lounging in Dick Star's saloon or abou the general store, had speculated on the river breaking. It was pleasant to assume that this was im minent, for on the spring flood came the welcom steamboat, its whistle sounding taps to winter's isola tion and bringing young and old in high excitemen to the wharf.

Twilight had properly put a check to such exube ance. It had frozen the rivulets and puddles, ha reminded Cloudman that the river still lay iceboun beneath its yellow willows. Yet spring infiltrate the rebuking chill. And spring was the time for th beloved project. Sunny skies, open roads, hollows dr enough for camp-fires—Benjy tramped faster as h

thoughts raced on. He would, he vowed he would, talk to his father that night.

Old Roger was walking ahead, Jenny Lind skipping from his hand. He was stooped and gentle. Benjy slowed down with a twinge of affectionate remorse. They would help him with the plowing, he thought hastily; and send back money for the hire of Walker's Abel; and Joseph would stay behind—after all, he was the only farmer in the lot.

But this was sheer evasion; Benjy knew it. The needs of the farm would not trouble his father at all. Old Roger farmed but negligently, as one must who prefers standing timber to cleared fields and a swamp full of flag lilies to good garden land. It was the loneliness of separation which would appal him. And Benjy remembered his father's delight in his children—how he loved to listen to them singing, how he had sold the cow to buy them their melodeon. It seemed cruel that the melodeon was partly responsible. Yet that trip down the river to buy it lay at the bottom of the plan. Or did it, after all?

Benjy considered, walking slowly along the road dimly lighted by stars and full of unholy ruts. His little sister trotted before him, Timmie and Tommie pranced and whistled behind, and the rest of the Angels stretched back in a line as straight as Benjy's thought. Jenny Lind's first visit to America!

There, he admitted, the plan had had its genesis; in that event now a decade old. It flamed out from

his childhood as she herself had flamed—Jenny Lind, for whom bonnets and pancakes and the youngest Angel had been named! The family had been living then in the village of St. Paul, and the Swedish singer had not ventured into such remoteness; but the brightness of her glory had, and lost nothing in the coming. Be sure of that!

Every arriving Mississippi steamboat had brought its score of tales, to be told and retold around the village pump, to be read and reread from newspapers worn threadbare. Benjy was twelve that year, Fanny barely eight. He had played P. T. Barnum to Fanny's Jenny Lind.

He remembered Fanny's hair drawn down to cover her small ears; Jenny Lind had no ears at all, folks said. He remembered Fanny's "Echo Song," composed in haste by her brothers; Jenny Lind herself had not echoed with more vim. Before an audience of half a score of children—French and Sioux and half-breed, barefooted and big eyed—Fan had made her curtseys and gathered up her flowers, one to the manner born.

"A wee bit fire we'll be needing to-night," Old Roger called over his shoulder. He had reached the squat log schoolhouse and was holding a lantern to the latch.

"Sir?" Benjy returned with a start. He followed his father inside, lighted the whale-oil lamps and, when a small fire was snapping, sat down, facing the

room. He unwound his crimson comforter, pulled off his muskrat cap and hung them between his knees, thoughtfully looking about him.

His father was erasing the blackboard. The children were playing in the aisle. Fanny sat on a back bench, wrapped in a yellow shawl. His eyes resting on her, Benjy resumed his reverie. Yes, that Jenny Lind concert had started their show madness.

In St. Paul at first and later down at Cloudman, he and his brothers and sisters had entertained their mates. In barns, in sheds, from wood-piles, they had sung and whistled and jigged—and scraped on home-made fiddles. (The fiddles had always been Benjy's.) With their teens had come more dignified performances. Their fame had spread as far as St. Peter and Mankato. They had been in demand for barn raisings, pound socials and the like. Benjy's dark face flashed into a smile at memory of these triumphs.

They seemed born to entertain as kings are born to rule—all of them but Joseph, an unwilling ticket-taker. Yet until that trip down river last fall, Benjy had never thought . . .

He had stopped at Bass's Tavern in St. Paul, the capital. A bustling place, it was! Senators in frock coats, red-shirted lumbermen, drivers from the Red River train with gaudy sashes and pockets full of money. He had bought the melodeon the day of his arrival, and then he had gone on a mission for

himself. He had bought a real, a proper violin, with the savings of all his days.

So enravished was he with its varnished surface, its swelling lines, its slender supple bow, that he hastened from the street to a corner of the lobby and took it from its case. First he only gazed, then he fondled it, then he lifted it and tucked it underneath his chin, and then he raised the bow and was playing, "Money Musk," and Bass's Tavern was forgotten. Bass's Tavern brought itself to mind with a cyclone of applause when "Money Musk" was done. Benjy in a glow swung to "The Devil's Dream"; his repertoire was meager. But before they let him go, he had played it all through twice; and strangers had passed his cap about and filled it full of coins, and this despite the fact that times were hard in Minnesota. The big boom days were over.

So Benjy made his great discovery. St. Paul, St. Anthony where the sawmills were, the thriving new town of Minneapolis—all of them were starved for music and its magic, starved for what the Angels had to give. Why, these fine places had little more than Cloudman, singing-schools and lyceums where they entertained themselves. Bell-ringers or a minstrel show packed their halls to overflowing. And these came so rarely from the distant east.

"We'd make our fortunes," he had whispered to himself as the *Time and Tide* carried him back up river.

"Steve! We'd make our fortunes!" he had whispered to his brother, beneath the eaves, on his return.

He whispered it now to himself, watching young Cloudman file in, filling the whitewashed room which was ruddy with fire-glow.

David John had come in and seated himself by Fanny. He sat very stiff and straight. Now and then he turned his head and smiled shyly down, and Fanny's small, dark face glimmered in response. Benjy's heart-beat quickened. Might she . . . might she stay behind? David was sweet on her, he knew, and he was a first-rate fellow.

But the idea was inconceivable to Benjy. Cloudman triumphing against the world! He smiled benignly on the pair and pursued his glamorous thoughts.

Old Roger drew lines and bars and notes—fence rails with posts and birds. He mildly reproved the peppermint suckers, sounded his tuning fork anew. Voices mounted in do, re, mi. Courting began on the dim, rear benches. And Benjy's thoughts traveled to Prairie du Chien, to Dubuque, to St. Louis, even.

> "Do they miss me at home?
> Do they miss me?
> 'Twould be an assurance most dear,
> To know that this moment some loved one
> Were saying, 'I wish he were here.' "

Benjy's eyes moistened as the melancholy waves rose to beat on the shadow-checkered walls.

"I'll chase the Antelope over the plain,"

Ah, that was different! He'd chase it over the plain, he would; up hill and down dale, too. The Antelope was glory. Benjy saw it bounding ahead. And he saw the young Angels bounding after, their weapon the music on their lips.

Benjy didn't sing that night. He listened to the singing of the others. It played on him like a bow on strings, like a wind on the leaves of a poplar. When the meeting was over, he found Steve's eye, nodded in quick signal. And Steve gave a comical grimace, but nodded in return.

Steve was the handsomest Angel, and was known to like the girls. He had never failed to see a girl home from singing-school. But to-night he firmly rounded up the twins and Jenny Lind, and kept his black eyes turned away from oyster-shell bonnets.

Fanny had disappeared—with David John, of course. No trouble keeping *her* away, Steve grumbled to himself. As he herded the young ones through the door, Benjy approached their father.

"Will you wait a moment, Pa? I want to talk to you."

III

"YOU'RE a little goldfinch in that shawl," said David John.

He said it precipitately, after a silence which had carried them all through singing-school to the very moment of dismissal.

He was shyer than any one but Fanny knew. A tall, strongly built boy with a grave face and a fund of natural dignity, he gave an impression of balance and power and maturity beyond his years. Cloudman looked at his well-hewn head, his upright forehead with its hummocky brows, his square protruding chin and stubborn shoulders and formed its opinion thereby. Fanny looked into his eyes. Dark blue, they were; deep wells of earnestness, of innocence, of startled appeal. Fanny found his secret there and protected it whimsically. Little boy, masquerading as a man!

"You're a handsome bluejay in that new flannel shirt," responded Fanny. She, at least, was not shy. She tucked her small hand into the curve of his arm with elfish delight in the emotion he evinced.

His arm pressed sharply against the little fingers. He looked down at her with that bewildered imploration. . . . He really was a darling, Fanny told

herself. Perhaps she *would* marry him . . . afterwhile, when he asked her.

She smiled up at him as they wedged their way to the door, and he reverted to her remark.

"Bluejays scare goldfinches, but you scare me," he said, looking pleased with his joke.

"Fiddle-dee-dee," said Fanny. She made a little moue which gave her honeysuckle mouth infinite desirability.

They paused for a moment in the doorway. Outside waited the silent, cool, spring-infiltrated night.

"Will you . . . will you go home the long way?" demanded David John.

Fanny motioned down to her skirts, belling out from her shawl to the floor.

"I mustn't. That terrible path . . ."

"I'll . . . I'll help you over the bad parts. I'd . . . like to," gulped David.

Taking the long way, they soon left the crowd behind. The main road followed the river. It led from the schoolhouse, past the stores and saloons, to the cluster of little homes. The path had the same terminals, but described an arc on the hillside. It included the spring which was frozen in winter and therefore seldom visited.

As David and Fanny mounted, the light from the schoolhouse grew dim. The flickering lanterns and rollicking voices faded into darkness and silence. They seemed to be climbing out of the world toward

a vast sky, dusted with stars, out of a black and bottomless world, emptied of humankind.

"Br-r-r," said Fanny, peeping over her shoulder. "This is as spooky as tipping tables. Isn't it spooky, David?"

"No," answered David. "I like it. I'd like to keep climbing forever."

"Not in my boots, you wouldn't," said Fanny, to annoy.

The nearer they drew to the spring, the more slippery grew the path. The caked ice had melted that day and run down in ribbons, now frozen. Fanny dropped David's arm and picked up her flaring skirts. He touched her shawled elbow stiffly, to steady her as they went.

"Here we are at the spring. Isn't it queer in the starlight? The icicles give it a white beard like you'll have some day," chattered Fanny.

She knew that his hold on her arm put David almost past speech. She felt the glee of seventeen years at this evidence of her power.

As David did not answer, she stopped and turned toward the valley. It lay like a sea of blackness, a sea without ship or buoy.

"Let's stand here and rest a moment. It's tedious to help me, I know."

"Tedious!" choked David. "Tedious!" Fanny's smile flickered unseen. "I'd like to *carry* you all the way home!" he cried in agonized truth.

To Fanny's surprise her heart fluttered, like her fan in the Varsouvienne. This was new. It was fearful, delicious. And she couldn't quite make it out. David was simply absurd, but there was a terrible force—as though with her trifling she had lighted a fuse and a cannon were thundering at her.

"Pooh, David John," she answered. "You wouldn't by the time you had got there."

"I would!" More cannon thunder. More fluttering of the fan.

"You wouldn't. Why, even Jenny Lind gets heavy when I carry her."

"I would!" He said it furiously.

"You wouldn't," she laughed, breathless.

He turned upon her, big, tremendously big in the darkness. His hand reached hers, touched it, slid up it to the wrist. Then it enclosed it quite, and Fanny felt her heart, not a fan but a windmill now, whirling, whirling, whirling.

Slowly he leaned toward her. He brushed her cheek with his. Then he kissed her on the lips and caught her in fearless arms.

"Fanny, Fanny, Fanny! Why, you love me, Fanny, don't you?"

" 'Spect I . . . 'spect I do," said Fanny. Her voice sounded surprised.

He held her fiercely close and she rested motionless. Except for her whirling heart, she felt weak,

nerveless, fluid. This was love; and this was David. How curious the whole thing was!

"Fanny, Fanny, Fanny!"

She let him kiss her again.

When she drew herself away, he yielded her, unprotesting. He stood for a moment, looking up, head back, arms wire-drawn down. Gladness seemed to soar from him, up, up to the star-filled sky. That immensity, alone, it seemed, could hold his overflow.

"I'll paint the house," he said, his voice shaken with joy. "You were always one for colors. Do you think red would be nice?"

"David John," said Fanny, still tremulous but assured, "I'd like to know how soon you think I'm going to marry you?"

"Oh, I suppose you'll have to have a dress and veil and fixings."

"Maybe I'll wait a year, or *two*."

He laughed aloud at that.

They started on again, now on the downward slope. David's long exultant strides were checked to suit her pace. Swinging her hand, chin in the air, he planned aloud as they walked. Fanny, marveling, shook her head. Where was her silent David?

"I don't want you to work hard. I'll get a hired girl when I can. I'll never let you do washing or scrub floors or make a fire. I want you to take things easy, like ladies back in Vermont. Just fuss around with wool-work and caps and things like that."

Fanny's slim brown fingers stirred restlessly in his.

"Let's not stay in Cloudman. There's no . . . adventure here."

"No adventure?" chuckled David. "Where I can shoot bears from my window?"

"Oh, that kind of adventure! I've had that all my life. I think that I'd like cities and towns and going around."

David considered this, their clasped hands poised in air.

"How'd you like a honeymoon trip, back to Vermont?" he asked.

"Oh, David!" Her voice bubbled. She snatched their hands to her breast.

"All right," he answered happily. "And I'll show you off to my folks."

Lights from the Cloudman cabins twinkled into view.

"I'm going right in and ask your father," David volunteered.

"Silly! Not to-night!"

"I am, though," he insisted. "I want to get it over."

But within the singing-master's gate, he paused in disappointment. There seemed to be no chance for private interview to-night. They could look through the shutterless windows into the low-ceiled room and see a whole consistory of Angels gathered there.

David had often thought this the pleasantest room in Cloudman, with the indigo and red rag carpet, the wood-dove feathers on the wall, the open littered melodeon, and the glowing crowded hearth. It was a pleasant room, and showed a pleasant scene to-night, though one faintly disturbing.

The whole family was up, even Jenny Lind. She and Timmie and Tommie were dancing in a circle. Old Roger and his eldest sons were talking in another. The mother sat with her hands in her lap, tranquil, listening.

"Whatever can be up?" asked Fanny in a whisper. "Come in and find out, at least."

She put her hand on the latch, but David pulled her back.

"I can't bear to have you go . . . even in there," he said. He kissed her hungrily.

An excited carol of voices seemed fairly to pull them in.

"The Angel Family Concert Troupe! The Angel Family Concert Troupe!"

Fanny smiled at David, a smile which regretfully said, "Our news will have to wait."

"What's up?" she asked of Jenny Lind, who had caught her about the knees.

"We're going away, traveling, giving concerts," came the shout.

"Who's going? Tell me, please. Don't every one talk at once."

"All of us, but Ma and Pa and Joseph."

Fanny hurried into the room, dropping her wraps as she went. The golden rings in her ears rocked with the speed of her step. About her little black head broke the storm cloud of explanation.

"The Lord didn't give us our voices for naught. I told Pa so." That was Benjy. "I was afraid he wouldn't see it, but he saw it right away. First he blew his nose, kind of to clear his feelings; then he put his hands behind him and seemed to think it over; and then he said, 'Where are those hickory strips that went over our covered wagon?' Now that's what I call fine."

"You've heard of old man Tingling?" This was Steve, pulling her arm. "The harness-maker at Winnebago City whose boys could do such tricks? They started out in a prairie schooner, doing 'em round about, and now they've a tent and a real trick pony. We can do just as well."

"They're daft, the lot of 'em." Joseph was fondly contemptuous. "Don't they know we've had hard times around here since 'fifty-seven? People aren't paying out money for shows. They haven't it to pay. If they pay at all, it will be in lots and squirrel skins and basswood lumber."

It was to Joseph, the scoffer, that Fanny put her question.

"Joe . . . tell me . . . we're going?"

"Yes, the Lord help you, you're going."

Fanny eyed him a moment, to be sure he was sincere. Then she plucked up her checkered skirts and billowed into a curtsey; into a series of curtseys as to a cheering throng, bending and lifting a glory-filled face, blinding in its delight.

It was blinding to David.

"Fanny!" he called out.

The naked pain of his voice struck through the happy hubbub. The Angels turned startled faces, and Fanny ran to him. She patted him with remorseful hands, pressed her cheek into his coat.

"David and I are going to be married," she said consolingly. "There, David. Now are you happy? But of *course* I'm going with the show. I couldn't stay behind."

"I won't have you a . . . trouper." It struggled in David's throat. He had come, you know, from Vermont and a sober God-fearing line.

Benjy'd watch out for his sister, Old Roger interposed. He might depend on that, Benjy assured him.

They were kindly, troubled, but impatient. David did not speak. Fanny twirled back to the others.

"I'll make my white delaine over—in flounces!" she cried.

"We're going to begin at the villages right around here."

"Wish Pa was ten years younger. We'd take him along."

About David's ears rang the jubilant carol of voices.

He stood at the door, very tall, very stiff, very distant. Fanny, who could have read them, did not look in his eyes. Their dark blue was clouded with pain and with bitter bewilderment.

"Good night, all," said David, going out.

IV

IT was mid-May when Bob and Jerry—most dispassionate of oxen—dragged into the black mire of the Government Trail a canvas-covered wagon which announced in azure letters THE ANGEL FAMILY CONCERT TROUPE.

. . . mid-May, and cool as that may be in the land of many waters. The sky and its reflecting lakes were a chill and windy blue. Willows along the water's edge trembled in pale chiffons. Wild plums on the hills were frosty white and the hardwoods not yet leaved. But the robins, singing rapturously while they fluffed protective feathers, didn't give an owl's hoot whether it was cold or not. And that was just the state of mind of The Angel Family Concert Troupe, from Jenny Lind to Benjy.

Hovering over the fire which boiled their barley coffee, snuggling beneath their blankets through the raw spring nights, plodding up and down the hills which were slippery with muck and water, they one and all declared that there was never such a May. Jenny Lind threw kisses to it from her perch on the driver's seat. The kisses of all the rest of them followed hers in spirit.

They passed the time in various ways—travel was

slow and labored. A favorite diversion was to sing old rounds and glees. Sometimes they spelled each other down, a complicated proceeding, as each spelled worse than the one before and no spelling-book was at hand. When they halted, one or another of them practised on the melodeon. This was wrapped in grain-sacks and set back in the wagon box. Often for hours at a time they made plans and sketched out programs. That discouraged Benjy; it was the only thing that did.

"We don't *know* the things we should," he explained dejectedly. "We don't even know their names —so how are we going to learn? Pa's taught us all his ballads, and we've heard hymn tunes in church, and Steve's forever picking up the songs of the rivermen. But there's opera . . . oratorio . . . what do we know about them?" He slapped the oxen gloomily.

"I should know 'Casta Diva'; I realize *that* at least. I wish I could hear some one whistle it," Fanny answered thoughtfully.

"You can't whistle things like that."

"I'll bet *I* could," said Timmie.

"Well, you couldn't," replied Benjy.

"Dick Star went up to St. Anthony, a year or so ago. You all remember it, and the fine concert he heard. The violinist, Ole Bull, and a little girl named Patti, no bigger than our Jenny Lind, still wearing pantalets. Dick is a great one for music, and he knows it better than most. But do you suppose he

could whistle the pieces that chick sang? They were all trills and curlicues, way beyond *him*, he said. He took down the names of the fiddler's things, and I'll buy them in St. Paul."

"There's a music store in St. Paul!" Fanny bounced on a horse-hair trunk.

"And we all of us catch on quick," Steve consoled his brother.

"And think how I play the double jew's-harp!" Tommie added grandly.

The first concert was given before May had warmed into June. A blinding rain had halted them on a swampy stretch of land. After the downpour ceased, the roads looked ruinous, and as it was late afternoon they decided to make camp.

Steve had shot a goose, to the great delight of them all. Their supplies were winter stores, brought with them from Cloudman; they were heartily sick of barley pancakes and potatoes with molasses. The twins had been dispatched for wood on anticipatory feet. They were gone an unconscionable time, considering their appetites, and they came back empty-handed, glowing, on a run.

A stage coach had broken down a distance up the road.

"And it's in up to the hubs . . . and the driver's gone for help . . . and they want us to come and give 'em a show . . . we told 'em about us!" they whooped.

An answering whoop went up, only Fanny checked hers as it rose. She cautiously fingered her throat and essayed a scale or two. The older boys rushed for the oxen. The twins put out the fire. And Jenny Lind ran to the trunk.

"Please, Fan, my red calico dress!"

Bored and reluctant, the oxen dragged forth the covered wagon. Tense on the driver's seat, Benjy maneuvered it, through the treacherous ooze, up the soggy roadside, to a point near the stranded coach where the passengers were gathered. This weary mud-splashed group found seats on a fallen tree; the curtained end of the wagon was backed deftly around; and between, on a bit of old carpet, the melodeon was placed, its grain-sacks proudly shed.

Fanny and Jenny Lind took frantic peeks through the flaps. They had been ordered to stay within and thus preserve their glamor. That portly man with sidewhiskers and lively flowered waistcoat? An hotel man from St. Anthony, the twins whispered reply. They had gathered, small-boy fashion, a budget of information, and this they excitedly shared as they struggled into jackets—doeskin jackets dyed and brightly beaded by their mother—cherished by their possessors above all earthly things.

There was an Indian agent, well known throughout the valley There was a Protestant missionary, bound for Traverse des Sioux. The black-gowned

priest was a Frenchman from Sibley's town, Mendota. And the woman with children, of course, had come out to join her husband. The other men were doubtless of the season's settler crop. Boots instead of moccasins—one had a swallow-tailed coat. Every spring the opening rivers brought steamboats crammed with them—these eager eastern claimants of the west.

Here was an audience indeed! Tastes enough to please! Atop his slender stooping body, Benjy's face was white. He brushed and oiled his hair, pinned on a paper rose, lifted out his violin with the rabbit's foot tied to the scroll. He cradled this in his arms for a tense, reflective moment; then dropped it and went to the blanket which walled their dressing rooms.

"Fan, I want you to open the program with 'Chase the Antelope.' "

"You do?" He heard her bounce.

Around the blanket's edge came her little sparkling face. Each mole on it seemed to sparkle and the golden circles swung. A black braid ran like an arch from ear to ear over her head. From her pointed velvet bodice the checkered skirt sprang out.

"*You're* supposed to open the program," she protested in a whisper.

"I know. But this will be lucky. I can't stop to explain."

"You'll play for me on the melodeon?"

"Yes. Are you ready to go?"

Softly, she ran up a scale, nodded and squeezed his arm.

Then Benjy was out declaiming the speech which he and Dick Starr had concocted. His shaking voice grew steady as he neared the climacteric end:

"One grand concert, folks! One grand concert, comprising ballads, hymns, glees, jigs, operatic arias and famous compositions for the double jew's-harp and the violin. A stupendous combination for the grave, the gay, the young, the old. An exorbitant entertainment where instruction and amusement are combined, virtue rewarded and vice punished. Ladies and Gentlemen, the justly renowned Angel Family Concert Troupe, composed entirely of star performers! Ladies and Gentlemen, the lovely and talented Miss Fanny Angel, who will open our program by showing Ossian Dodge himself, if he happen to be present, how to sing 'Ossian's Serenade'!"

This last was extemporaneous, but it went extremely well. Fanny advanced in a series of curtseys, on the tips of Benjy's fingers. Benjy tucked his long legs under the little melodeon and, not without a flourish, played the rippling opening bars. Fanny folded her small hands and lifted her voice in song:

"Oh, come with me in my little canoe,
Where the sea is calm and the sky is blue,
Oh, come with me for I long to go,
To those Isles where the mango apples grow."

Spangles in candle light! That was Fanny's voice. Red wine in the sunshine! That was Fanny's voice, too. Benjy thought of David John, briefly, pityingly. But he knew that David John was not in his sister's song. It was not a serenade to her but a call to life, a challenge, as it had been to him since that night at singing-school.

> "I'll chase the Antelope over the plain,
> The Tiger's cub I'll bind with a chain,
> And the wild Gazelle with its silvery feet,
> I'll give thee for a playmate sweet."

Oh, yes, they'd chase the Antelope, Benjy's heart agreed. Up state, down river, to distant cities even. His violinist's fingers pounced recklessly at the keys.

> "I'll chase the Antelope over the plain . . ."

Fan was repeating the refrain. The last verse had been sung. The last note hung in the air. The dejected row on the cottonwood, which had straightened surprisingly, burst into shouts and hand-clapping, delightfully prolonged.

"Hear! Hear! Will you give 'em an encore, Sis?" Hand on his heart, Benjy was bowing low.

" 'Within a Mile o' Edinboro Town,' " came from the depths of Fanny's melting curtsey.

"I rather think they like you. What do you think, eh?"

"The darlings! Oh, the darlings!"

Undoubtedly they liked her; their clattering hands proved that. Or they had kindled to that spark which she and Benjy felt. The concert was more than successfully launched. Its passage was assured. The hotel man lighted a thick cigar and cradled his thumbs in his vest.

There was, it developed pleasingly, something for every one—for the settler's children, Timmie and Tommie, brave in their beaded jackets. They whistled and jigged and danced; they performed on the double jew's-harp; they grimaced and acted up until frowned upon by Benjy.

Dignity was restored by Steve with, "The Light of Other Days." Later he tickled the easterners with a song of a voyageur. Steve was fond of these rollicking tunes of the canoemen of his childhood, but they were common in Minnesota and little relished there. The man in the swallow-tailed coat cheered and waved his cane at "En Roulant Ma Boule," sung in Steve's laughing tenor.

"Stevie! *Stevie!*" Fanny hugged him behind the canvas flap.

There was something for every one. If Benjy's "Fisher's Hornpipe" slightly ruffled the missionary, and it obviously did, Fanny was more than soothing, singing, oh, so sweetly:

> "I'm but a stranger here,
> Heaven is my home."

And Jenny Lind was a triumph! Hoop braid and swinging earrings, curtseys and quirked fingers, for all the world like Fanny's, she sang "I've Got a Beau," with dainty coquetry.

"And don't you give him the mitten!" some one called from the log.

But on the family singing the audience united. It united to bestow vociferous approval. How the Angels sang together, six golden voices rising, one voice miraculously splintered into harmony! "Twinkling Stars are Laughing, Love!" "Annie Laurie," "Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon," as their father had taught them to sing them, and "Nid, Nid Noddin' " at the end, where, thanks again to Roger, they didn't make the error of affecting drowsiness. They knew their Scotch, the Angels. The six black heads wagged briskly.

"And we're *a'* noddin' at our house at hame."

They sang the "Nid, Nid, Noddin' " with the sunset red behind them, with the stage-coach driver cheerfully whisking off the seats, with the company on the cottonwood smiling in dispersal. The first concert was over, and it had gone off well.

While Jenny Lind passed Benjy's cap, the hotel man spoke to Benjy.

"Damned if you can't sing," he observed admiringly.

"Thank you, thank you, sir. I'll tell the others so." Benjy's tone was fervent.

With a plump and thoughtful finger, his companion smoothed the whiskers that stood out from his cheeks like freshly laundered frills.

"I run the finest hostelry this side of Chicago, the Winslow House, St. Anthony. You've heard of it, of course? We cater to the southern trade, planters and their families . . . slaves, too, sometimes, damnably enough. They come up in the summer on the Mississippi boats."

"Yes, sir," puzzled Benjy.

"Well, when you're in St. Anthony, drop in at the hotel . . . I'll give you the use of our parlors for a show. The damned slave drivers like to be amused, and they have a mint of money."

Benjy stared a moment. Then he threw out both his hands. If he'd had his fiddle handy, he'd have flung it in the air.

"You're a prince, sir! You're a prince! We'll be there, no doubt of that!"

The driver's horn rang out.

"Steve!" called Benjy. "Fanny!"

After the scramble of farewell, with its milling hands and handkerchiefs as the stage coach lurched away; after the fever of counting their money, black heads close and hearts pounding together; after Benjy's thrilling news, thrillingly imparted and

received with tears and laughter, handsprings and huzzas, Tommie raised a shout.

"Come on! The goose!"

Benjy for a moment could not believe his ears.

"The goose! You'd *eat* that goose?"

Tommie almost quailed beneath his brother's eye.

"Why, yes. Of course I would."

Benjy's gaze whirled around for support in his amazement. He found instead Tommie's confusion mirrored.

"You'd eat that goose!" he cried. "Why, it laid our golden egg. That goose," he went on vehemently, "is to be stuffed. You hear? And nailed up on the wagon to bring us luck again. We'll eat pancakes for supper, and just one round of fruit-cake," he added, giving Jenny Lind's drooping head a pat.

"Benjy's right," said Fanny. "The goose brought us our luck."

"You know," Steve ventured gently, "it's half plucked. That'll look queer."

"Queer!" said Benjy. "Queer! Does this three dollars look queer? Give me a hand to this melodeon. You hop to the oxen, Steve."

V

HAIR AND WHISKERS DYED ALL SHADES, FROM A LIGHT AUBURN TO AN UNCOMPROMISING BLACK

STEVE read and reread this enticing offer.

He was obliged, indeed, to read it, being afraid to turn his head. Neck stiff, body rigid, legs straight as in a brace, he faced it from the barber's chair. It was pasted to the mirror opposite.

He wished he had come in to have his newly cultivated sideburns dyed a light auburn. But nature had made them a black too uncompromising to be trifled with. It was much, however, to be having them trimmed, to be having his neck shaved, to be having his hair combed and oiled with bear's grease. It was much to be in a barber's shop at all. And this was such a fine one—opposite the Winslow House itself—red velvet chairs, a great mirror . . .

He rolled his black eyes cautiously about, and they encountered Benjy. At sight of his brother, his ready laughter rose. And he himself, he suddenly appreciated, made just such a picture of scared solemnity. Yet the place had an easy informal air. That other customer even had his legs crossed.

"Limber up! Limber up!" Steve whispered in a

chuckle, as Benjy's black eyes rolled cautiously to his. "We look like a couple of parsons at a minstrel show."

He crossed his own legs, pocketed his hands, smiled his engaging smile at the mirror.

Even so, the effect was unacceptable. He puzzled over their reflections. Gingham shirts, cheap slop-shop trousers, the moccasins so commonly used instead of boots—ordinarily these would have been not out of place in St. Anthony and Minneapolis. But the summer invasion of immigrants and tourists was at its height this fecund mid-July. White linens and rare straws, high silk hats and showy waistcoats smartened the dusty streets. Benjy and Steve, arriving there that morning, talking to the manager of the splendid Winslow House, had felt shy, awkward, not at all their dashing selves. Fanny, he believed, had divined the reason.

Steve knew that Fanny longed for a pair of real hoops. How the visiting ladies floated! Yet she had insisted vigorously that she would do without. And Fanny could be vigorous, though she was such a wisp. What was spent at all must be spent on him and Benjy, she declared. They looked like a pair of woodsmen; they couldn't sing like that. One of them would have to wait until the concert was over, but the other must get proper clothes—to-day—from what Joseph had sent.

They had had to appeal to Joseph a week or so

before. Money had seemed nonexistent in the path their wagon took. Produce was legal tender all up and down the valley. The troupers had been bountifully fed and delightedly received. Happy the jig and fiddle in those rough frontier hotels! Yet Benjy's cap had collected only shinplasters and coppers. These would not permit them to invade St. Anthony.

So they had sent to Joseph. Just this once, they said, and when they reached St. Anthony they would pay it all back and more. Joe had sent a fine big load of the precious ginseng root, which all Minnesota hunted and all China seemed to crave. The "sang" had been exchanged for gold soon after their arrival. As Fan had said, there was enough to outfit one of them. But each had refused to be adorned at the sacrifice of the other, and at that seeming deadlock they had sought the barber's chair.

Well, Benjy must take it, that was all, Steve decided now. He shut his beauty-loving eyes to the gingham shirt in the glass. Benjy was leader of the troupe—without even a high hat. Steve would make him take it, and there was an end of that.

Opening his eyes upon this noble resolution, he saw a crowd of fashionables gathered in the street. Chippewas on the warpath, he speculated idly? A shifting of the crowd brought the object into view. It was nothing but the driver of a Red River cart. Trains of these squealing carts, hauled by buffalo

and oxen, brought loads of costly furs to St. Paul twice a year. The drivers, half-breeds mostly, a gaudy singing crew, were common on the streets of the two towns at the falls.

Watching, Steve saw the driver with the eyes of these southern folks, the folks for whom he was that very night to sing. They found him picturesque, as the man in the swallow-tailed coat had found his "En Roulant Ma Boule." Steve recollected suddenly the garb of a voyageur. (It was familiar to him from his childhood in St. Paul.) The jaunty stocking cap, the capote made of a blanket, the varicolored sash, the leather leggings. That was picturesque, just as picturesque as this. And how it fitted those gallant songs that he loved and sang so well! And how it fitted also (for the Angels were never modest), his slenderness and blackness and that swagger which he had! If those pretty floating ladies admired that gawkish lout . . . that settled it.

He caught his brother by the arm as they stepped into the street, barbered to gentility and smelling of bergamot.

"You may have the high hat, Benjy, and all the things you need. I don't want 'em. Wouldn't have 'em. I've got a roaring plan."

"Don't think you can fool me," said Benjy suspiciously. "I won't take 'em, I tell you. It's share and share alike."

"I'm not trying to fool you. I do want a stocking cap. I want a dozen things more but the rest are in Fanny's trunk."

Swinging ahead with mercurial lightness, Steve began to hum:

"Roulite roulant,
Ma boule roulant."

"What is your crazy plan?" asked Benjy, skeptical of these high spirits.

"How the ladies will love me!" cried Steve, all but dancing. He addressed a passer-by. "Please, sir, will you direct me to a haberdashery? A good one, if you please."

"I won't take 'em!" shouted Benjy. "What's come over you?"

"Two doors from the bridge? Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Roulite roulant,
Boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule qui roule,
En roulant ma boule."

Benjy stopped, planted his long legs far apart and riveted his gaze on his brother.

"Of course," said Steve, "if you're going to take that attitude . . . I want to dress like a voyageur and sing the river songs. The street was blocked a

few minutes ago when a Red River driver passed by. Think how these visitors will relish a *vrai mangeur de lard.*"

For an instant Benjy wavered; he *did* want proper clothes, and Steve seized blithely upon his indecision.

"So it's settled. Come along then. Rock candy for the young ones and a pair of hoops for Fan."

"Roulite roulant,
Ma boule roulant."

And they proceeded.

Half an hour later, on the winding river-path, they came within sight of their encampment. Slightly dimmed by weather, but with its azure lettering still legible, the canvas-covered wagon stood close to the water's edge. Curious children surrounded it, staring at Fanny and Jenny Lind who were unabashedly drying their hair in the sun on the back step. When the sisters caught sight of Benjy and Steve, they ran out to meet them, circled about Benjy with cries of admiration.

He looked to be seven feet tall in that burnished stovepipe hat. And he was the figure of a man in the square-cut, double-tailed coat. His bright magenta waistcoat had a brass chain draped across it. The first boots he had ever worn punished his supple feet.

Steve capered about with a package, which he presently tossed to his sisters. Jenny Lind ran off

shouting with a sticky, opaque mass. Fanny shook out a cotton petticoat which was circled by reeds run in casings.

"But what did *you* buy, Steve?"

"This red stocking cap. See?" Then he dove into the trunk, came up with a blanket and a sash in either hand. "Here, help me into these things. Fan, *you* tie the sash." Excitedly they assisted.

When he was costumed he sang out "Good-bye" and struck up the river way, the stocking cap aslant and the backs of his hands on his hips.

The twin towns flanked the river near the broad Falls of St. Anthony, a sheet of living water in the ardent July sun. The older town, named for the falls, and lying in Steve's path, was soon to lose itself in the brisk young Minneapolis. They were already joined by a fine suspension bridge and by their common interest in the flour and lumber mills. Commerce had laid a finger on these draperied isles and banks, but it was a finger only.

A second Niagara Falls, another Saratoga—these prophecies clustered about Minneapolis then; and hotels were springing up in those wilds about the falls toward which Steve made his way. There rose the Winslow House, four stories of blue stone, iron balconies, a flagstaff—could New York boast anything finer? From its lookout, Steve had heard, one could see for twenty miles, see the towers of Fort Snelling and the confluence of the rivers.

At this hour of the day the seekers of health and pleasure gathered with their goblets at the Chalybeate Springs. The townspeople came too, set their watches by the sun-dial and viewed the day's parade of beaux and belles from east and south. Here, Steve turned his steps, not at all displeased to find himself an object of fluttering attention. Light-footed, and light-hearted, he wandered through the crowd with a special smile for ladies and enraptured girls and boys.

Pausing in the doorway of a vine-grown summer-house, he heard behind him a bubbling, girlish voice.

"Mais, je l'adore, maman . . . ces belles jambes . . . cette tête noire . . ."

Turning abruptly, he met a pair of wide eyes—green, yellow-flecked eyes, thickly fringed in black lashes. No less eager than the eyes were a circled red mouth and a slight buoyant figure, seated, bent forward upon a parasol.

Confusedly aware that he had heard her, but secure in a conviction that he had not understood, she drew back hurriedly.

"Fais quelque chose! Bon Dieu, maman, il faudra lui faire croire que je parlais d'un autre personne."

In obedience to the first injunction, Maman, a small and dowdy lady, began to arrange the blond lace ties which fastened the girl's leghorn bonnet. Steve returned in bored fashion to his contemplation of the view.

Now the Angels were as familiar with their mother's pseudo-French as with their father's Scotch idiom. A dialectal form of the tongue of Father Hennepin was still in common use in some parts of Minnesota. Steve was quite aware that the vivacious young lady had stated that she adored him. Also he had not missed her observation of his legs. So with all the power of drooping, ennuied shoulders, he tried to lure her into further remark.

He succeeded. After a moment of nervous conversation regarding the bonnet strings, the girl, still speaking in French, confided to her companion:

"He didn't understand. Heavens, wasn't I lucky? And did you notice when he turned what sweet black eyes he has? I am sure he is very brave. I wish I could be rescued . . . I wish to the Virgin and all her saints that I could be rescued!"

"Rescued from what?" her mother demanded crossly. "Mercy of God, Virginie, but you are an idiot. Come back with me at once. It is past the hour for your practice."

Without a sparkle of ill-humor, with, indeed, an assurance which conveyed that Maman was a person of very little consequence, Virginie continued:

"Oh, rescued from anything: If I had my pony here, I'd ride exactly in front of him and fall. Yes, I would. Well, if you insist, we will go. At least I shall make him show his eyes again. Watch!"

Soft movements told Steve that she was adjust-

ing her costume—the spreading skirts of pea-green silk, the lace mantle, the leghorn bonnet with a feather. Then, there was a rustle which betokened the opening of her parasol.

As the mother passed out and the girl came abreast of him, the ivory tip of this parasol caught in the lintel.

She spoke—in pretty, broken English, now.

"I fear that I must trouble you, monsieur."

Steve turned, and for a long-spun moment their eyes held. A warm throbbing current flowed from green-yellow to black and back to green-yellow again. Absorbed wholly by her eyes, yet he found later that he remembered other things—her pointed face, delicately colored; her bands of dark auburn hair.

He took the tiny parasol from her and detached it. Holding it lengthwise, he laid it sacramentally across her hands.

"I regret," he said in French, "I regret more than you, Mademoiselle, that it is only a parasol which I rescue."

There was a shocked gasp from Maman. Virginie flushed a deep rose-pink. For a second her thick dark lashes broke the warm current of their gaze. Then her eyes met his again. She smiled. Slowly, like a cloud drifting, she sank into a curtsey.

"My only defense, Monsieur," she said, "is that I spoke the truth."

When she was gone, Steve stood in tranced rigidity. If he did not move he could bring her back so plainly . . . her whispering silks, her scents. Alas for his girls in homespun! He had never felt even remotely this enveloping enchantment.

He broke into a run, pressed sharply through the crowd. It swam along the promenade—the parasol of his heart. Checking his pace, he followed after. The colored trifle blurred to his strained gaze.

This turn and that, it took, a fairy ship in the blue. This turn and that took Steve, though in irons of despair. For fairy ships sail out of mortal ken, as even children know. And this one was bearing out of his life his lovely, lovely lady.

He stopped at a rise in the path. He stopped to stare ahead. His heart climbed, singing, into his throat. Placidly curling above the trees was the flag on the Winslow House. The sound of stringed music floated down. There were voices, and people moving.

And across the whitely dotted lawn, into the awnings' shade, advanced Virginie's parasol, directly, as if it belonged there.

That meant he would see her again—that night. He would sing! How he would sing!

VI

FROM one mirror to another flashed the quivering effulgence of the crystal-hung, lamp-girdled chandelier. Plaster of Paris cherubs sporting on lofty ceilings, marble statuettes posing on mantel ends, stiff lace curtains dropping to deep-piled Brussels carpet gleamed in the double glow. An overwhelming room, the Angel family found it; antipodal, indeed, to the valley hostelries. They regarded it by turns from the door of their antechamber with rounded fearful eyes.

To Steve alone its elegance was completely undisturbing; inadequate, in fact, as the setting of his mood. If the floor had been paved with sapphires, it would have been rather better.

He watched the ladies billowing in, in their widespread, sibilant skirts, with their low-cut, lace-wreathed bodices, their languid feather fans; and the gentlemen, smelling of whiskey, diamond studs in their vests; and the flicker of negro faces out in the narrow hall.

Behind him, Fan was singing scales, softly, under her breath. And Jenny Lind came running in, jangling the tambourine with which she had gone through the parlors, summoning the guests. A

bubbling excitement pervaded, which Steve approved and shared. Not that Virginie had yet appeared, but she would appear, she would.

Like the passage of a dream, the concert began, proceeded. Fanny swayed from Benjy's fingers to a faint polite applause. She had done wonders with herself, Steve appreciated dimly, his eyes returning to her from a quest about the room. Ferns, columbine and daisies trailed from her loosened hair. The new hoops wafted out the well-worn delaine dress. Nervousness painted her cheeks in a most alluring fashion, but it also shook her voice through, "Chase the Antelope."

Vigilant at the door, Steve was yet aware that the audience was colder than any they had met. Though Benjy had learned "The Arkansas Traveler" and delivered it with spirit, he did not check for a moment the calmly waving fans. (These had heard Ole Bull's intoxicating rendition.) The ladies cooed over Jenny Lind, but a small group sauntered out when her song came to an end. The twins importuned to try; Benjy strove with them in whispers; and during the frantic conference Steve's gaze found its reward.

A shaft of light . . . Virginie . . . in the distant entrance arch.

"No! It's up to Steve." Benjy touched his brother's arm.

Steve whirled about, his face alight.

"Play me, 'A Saint Malo.'"

Caught by Steve's excitement, Benjy tuned up hurriedly, called out an introductory word, plunged into the merry air. A leap and a bow and Steve, red stocking cap oblique, eyes flashing and teeth gleaming, took up the melody.

"A Saint Malo, beau port de mer,
Trois gros navir's sont arrivés—"

The laughing lawless form seemed afoot in a light canoe.

Walls faded as Steve sang; lights dimmed. Dark forests and wild streams were hardly an arrow's flight away, his listeners remembered. And down those wild streams, the voyageurs went singing, went singing, as they paddled, this song of ladies three.

Steve sang them "En Roulant Ma Boule," and "Chantez, Mignonne, Cecelia." From one air to another he was clamorously urged. He did not look Virginie's way, but her corner glistened gold. As he smiled into other eyes, he tingled at thought of hers.

"It is long that I have loved thee,
Ne'er wilt thou forgotten be."

The refrain from "A la Claire Fontaine," ran into English in his head. As he sang it for the last time, he looked at her and smiled.

"Ne'er wilt thou forgotten be."

His brothers and sisters joined him. They veered into ballads and glees. The room was a friendly turmoil when the "Nid, Nid, Noddin' " came. From the crowd which hemmed them in, an imperious fan touched Steve. He turned to see Virginie, smiling and scarlet cheeked.

"You sing!" she said, naïvely pleased, naïvely confident that this was justification enough for her addressing him.

"Yes," answered Steve. "Did you like it?" He was suddenly less bold, quite unable to tell her that he had been singing for her.

"Me . . . I sing also," she said. "I will sing for you some time."

"Many, many times!" Steve cried impetuously, from his heart.

Again that current flowed warmly, magically, around them. On a small square of carpet, jostled from every side, they were mysteriously islanded, intimate, alone. A smile passed from eye to eye that was like a whispered secret.

They moved through the arched doorway, down the narrow hall; and now she was, perplexingly, grand lady to him again. The width of her silken skirts removed her as they walked, and in an illusory way so did other things—the hoop of jewels in her hair, her bertha of real lace, her half-length gloves embroidered in tiny topazes.

She led him up a flight of stairs into an empty par-

lor which opened through long windows on a shelf-like balcony. They continued to the balcony and stood there, side by side, and darkness hid that formidable richness of her dress.

They could count the stars on their fingers, there were so very few. These hung like splendid lamps in a low, sheltering sky. No lights shone from the towns which were wrapped in a slumberous dark, though the river crashed over the falls with no regard for sleepers.

"That Mississippi flows down to my home," Virginie said at last. She spoke, slowly, in English.

"Your home? Where is your home?"

"Why, New Orleans, of course. I sing in the opera there."

"The opera!" cried Steve. Here was a tragical gulf. "I wish you didn't," he muttered, turning his head away.

"Oh, the opera!" scoffed Virginie. "That isn't so very much. There isn't a voice in the company like yours. You could sing in it if you wished."

She gave of her experience.

"My father and mother were singers in the opera at Paris. They came over to New Orleans, and shortly my father died. My mother was a wardrobe mistress and for years we were frightfully poor. However, I made my début last year, so that's all over now."

She smiled through the gloom.

"In New Orleans, they would love your songs of the voyageurs," she said.

Heat mounted to Steve's temples.

"Would you like me to come?" he asked.

She did not move nor answer.

Along the iron railing, he felt the tug of her hand—her hand which lay so still a foot or more away. His hand flashed out and caught it, and hers turned uppermost. Tightly, hotly, their fingers clung together.

There were footfalls in the parlor, and a white-frilled negro face peered from the lighted doorway.

"Mademoiselle . . . your mother searches . . ."

"I will come, Annette. Go away."

Annette's footsteps receded.

The river leaped and hurled itself noisily on the rocks. Its tumult came but faintly through the ringing in Steve's ears. Then swiftly, inexplicably, they were in each other's arms. He was pressing a soft face, a soft enrapturing body.

The stars sang in the heavens—mad triumphant music—before she pulled herself away, and they stood trembling.

"You will come . . . you will come to New Orleans?"

"Of course I will come."

"You will come with us . . . on our boat?"

"What boat do you take?"

"*The Northern Belle* . . . to-morrow."

"Oh!" cried Steve despairingly, "I can't take that. But before many days I will come."

She stamped her foot, caught at his arm.

"I want you to come to-morrow."

"But I can't. Don't you see? I shall have to earn the money."

"Here, then. Take this." She jerked the jeweled hoop from her hair.

"No," answered Steve, "I couldn't do that. But I will come. You don't need to be afraid."

This time they did not hear the patter of footsteps.

"Your mother, mademoiselle. She is climbing the stairs . . ."

Virginie flung herself again into Steve's arms. Again the crash of the river receded and the song of the stars came down to his ears. Then she was gone, and he stood, dizzy. He felt her kisses on his lips. He felt something else which cut his palm. . . .

He went slowly out into the little parlor, holding the glittering hoop in his hands. He would find her at once and give it back to her. If he waited, if he put it away . . .

He went down the stairs, down the hall to the office. The crowd had swallowed her, and her mother and Annette. But the clerk would know her, would be glad to return this ornament, to give her a message from the admiring finder of it.

His brothers and sisters were clustered in a

corner. They were counting their money and chattering together. He would give this to the clerk and join them at once, and some day, perhaps, when he was rich and famous . . .

But when Fan turned and started toward him, he felt a curious wrench. For he knew that inevitably he was going with Virginie. Why, of course, of course, he was going down the river on *The Northern Belle* to-morrow!

"Steve!" cried Fan. "Five dollars. Just imagine! It was all *your* singing of the river songs!"

Steve fastened the hoop of topazes and diamonds inside his knitted sash.

VII

AND so Steve took *The Northern Belle* down river. And in a prairie-schooner with a half-plucked goose at its pole the depleted concert troupe proceeded on its way, mournfully but hopefully withal. They missed Steve's smiling presence and his voice in the choruses—the voices of the twins were inopportunely changing—but they warmed their thoughts at the fire of his romance. The Angels loved romances.

They took a northern trail along the Mississippi. Banners of autumn led the way for their little cavalcade—blackhaws and thorn-apples; goldenrod, asters and thistles; then pale yellow elms, ruddy maples and darkly burning oaks. When soaking rains brought down the leaves, beauty was with them still—ducks etched in a drab sky, frail mullein stalks by the roadside; and at last the whiteness of new-fallen snow, in a thin, exquisite veiling.

They woke to this latter the morning after their concert in Anoka. Its deliciously fresh odor penetrated the wagon. The children tumbled out with glee. But Benjy's look was sober. Red flannel must be bartered for, and a food supply secured.

After the morning meal he called a family council.

"If we did the sensible thing, we'd turn about, of course. But there's money to be made here. We have no competition. These people haven't seen a show since they left the state of Maine. Sally St. Clair's Minstrels are working the southern part of the state. Others, too, for all we know. That's easier to reach. And I'm for sticking here until real winter comes. That is, if you, Fan, and the rest, are willing to take the risk."

The decision was to take it, and they followed the river on an ever-whitening path through ever-thickening woods. But the raw little towns were lavish only of staring friendly interest. They knew what winter was and how precious coppers were.

The concert troupe performed in grocery stores and cabins. The twins grew agile at jigging atop molasses kegs. When Benjy fiddled, he tapped his foot keeping time and keeping warm. Fanny sang enwrapped in shawls, but she had a troubling cough.

It was hard for the cough to improve in a canvas-covered wagon where sleet drifted in to rest in thin furrows on the robes. They drew the flaps more tightly and then jolted along in a suffocating, sickening airlessness and blackness. Food became scarce with them. No meat, no tea, no butter. Salt and coffee were hoarded, and wheat was ground and boiled. The smell of frying pork, which once they had found repugnant, became a fragrant memory delicious to recall.

Once on a day of days they had a roasted pheasant. It was Jenny Lind who found the bird sitting in the snow. She brought it in in her arms, limp and unresisting.

"He was *glad to* be taken!" she cried. "He *wants* to help us out. I won't look while Benjy kills him, but I don't mind it a bit."

She turned her back determinedly, squeezed shut her tear-filled eyes. Benjy had wet eyes, too, as he took the huddled bird.

Easy enough to say that the creature had strayed from its mates during the migration; easy enough to say that it had been numbed by cold, and so permitted capture by a tiny singing girl. For the Angels it was a miracle, a glittering miracle. They watched with breathless thanks while Fanny ate the breast.

Benjy turned south at last, but travel had been slow. Now the trails would soon be closed, Indians and settlers said. An Indian left that week for St. Paul with the mail and would make one more trip if the heavy snows held off. Then all would be trapped for the winter by the black encircling pines.

"We'd better write to Joseph," Fanny recommended. It was comforting to them to think of Joseph then.

They asked him to send money to them at Anoka. Then, when they reached Anoka, they would find it waiting. And they would accompany the Indian on his last trip to the Falls. It was a comforting plan.

Slowly, very slowly, they proceeded to Anoka. The road was full of pits and chasms, and movement was torturing. It was the more torturing because of their empty stomachs. They had never suspected how empty stomachs could be.

"What if Joseph shouldn't send it?"

"He'll send it . . . good old Joseph."

"It's rather lucky, isn't it, that Joseph doesn't sing?"

But they couldn't call that lucky, not even with stomachs empty.

"No, it's too bad. Poor old Joseph!" they murmured in sympathy.

They had reached the tiny French settlement of Dayton. They could not, simply could not, go farther without food. They camped by the frozen river, beneath a sheltering hill which also overhung the single street.

"We've got to eat, that's all," Benjy told Jenny Lind. She had taken to accompanying him on his long, troubled walks. Having no Steve to confer with, he found himself sustained by her clinging hand, skipping steps, and trustful upturned face.

They stood together now on the shoulder of the hill and Benjy thought aloud with his eyes on the street below.

"These folks won't give us money. They haven't it to give. But there are plenty of supplies in the dugouts of those cabins."

His black brows pulled together while Jenny Lind gazed up, positive that some divine solution was forthcoming.

"Jenny Lind! A donation party!"

"Like they give the minister!" She bubbled at the quick relief which showed in Benjy's face.

"Tommie can print a banner."

"And we'll hang it in the store . . ."

"That Bernier's General Store where we're going to give the show. . . ."

The tall boy and the small girl capered in the snow; then joined red-mittened hands and ran down to tell the rest.

Tommie was enchanted to show his skill at printing. Timmie swallowed envy like a dose of castor oil. Fanny leaned out eagerly from the shabby sheath of blankets in which she had wrapped herself against the cold.

A clean cardboard was ripped from the cover of her trunk. Tommie sucked his pencil, bore blackly down in his pride. Dictation was general, but he accepted what he willed. The spirit and the spelling of the banner thus were his.

SAVE YUR MONEY! !

Not 1 ct. required for admishun to the Grand Concert Angel Family Concert Troupe. Bernier's Store. 3 o'c tomorrow.

Vittels are wanted by the Famus Troupe. Espeshully by the Butiful and Fare Miss Fanny Angel who is suffering from a Cold.

Bring Jelly, Tea, Corn Cake, whatever comes Handy. The Akomplished Player on the Double Jew's Harp likes Corn Cake.

Grand Entertainment Pervided.

This banner slung between them, the twins ran down the street. Within a gaping circle, they nailed it to a hogshead in the store. The twins did not object to gaping circles. They relished them, in fact. They swelled over the questions which came faster and faster from women with small black shawls over their heads, from men in huge blazing comforters. Fanny's beauty and her cough, her hunger and her trills, did not lose in their descriptions.

In preparation for the performance, Fanny made Jenny Lind's hair into thirty-six curls and loaned her a velvet snood. She heard the twins rehearse their act and retied the rabbit's foot on Benjy's violin. At three o'clock they set off through a thin veil of snow, conversing languidly, not entirely unaware of the groups of curious people gathered along their path.

Tommie had gone ahead to act as ticket-taker. They found him behind a table loaded with greasy bundles. He rolled his eyes toward Timmie who gave an appreciative sniff. Benjy cuffed them both, but his own eyes were dancing.

The crowd pushed in behind them. Bundle was piled on bundle. There was indeed a warm spicy odor in the air. It is doubtful whether the Muses alone were served in the performance, the rollicking performance which the Angels gave that day.

By ones, twos, threes, fours and together, they sang, danced, fiddled and recited. Benjy took a flight into minstrelsy with "Sweet Ham Bone" and "Climbin' Up Them Golden Stairs." Ashamed of their defection in the matter of singing, the twins had acquired a pirated version of "Too Late for the Train," which sent the company into roars of laughter. And if there were in the vicinity any lovers' quarrels to be mended, Benjy and Fanny must have mended them with "Meet Me by Moonlight Alone."

It was a gala performance. "The Cork Leg" was repeated three times to auditors bent double. Then lamps were lighted and bundles seized. Their delighted benefactors hemmed the Angels in.

"Tea!"

"Pemmican!"

"Cranberries!"

"Dried apples!"

They were still feasting at their camp-ground when the moon came up—all but Timmie, who was pacing about with both hands pressed to his middle.

"Not so greedy," warned Benjy. "These supplies must last. What if Joseph shouldn't send the money?"

"Oh, he'll send it . . . Crickety! What corn cake! . . . Pass me the cranberry jelly."

Tommie lay down on his back and pulled out his double jew's-harp.

VIII

JOSEPH was stretched his slim length on the floor, smiling into the fire. In his open, relaxed hands, he held a leather pouch. Now and then he squeezed it in impulsive delighted fingers. Again he found through the leather the outlines of the coins —ten of them, gold pieces all. His black eyes became thoughtful.

At the far end of the room, by the light of a tallow dip, Old Roger was writing music in an account book. The mother sat on a splint-bottomed chair in the shadows. Neither the scratching of the pen nor the nearness of that square, reposeful figure penetrated Joseph's thought. The hours which had gone to the filling of this pouch!

The hours and hours of steadfast search and labor! Lonely watchings by frozen streams and rivers; solitary expeditions into stifling woods with sack and ginseng hoe! All the woodcraft that he had from his mother, the knowledge of barks and roots and the little fur-bearing creatures, with something of her vast indomitable patience, Joseph had used. The first of what he had earned had gone to his brothers and sisters. The memory of that sacrifice brought still a shiver of pain. But though this money had

come slowly, it had come in time, thank God!—in time for the first boat down to the capital, down the Mississippi to Prairie du Chien and thence to Chicago where the college and his future lay.

His happiness had its roots in a deep, heart-warming pride, for he had done what he had done of his own constancy. He had had no encouragement, no support in his enterprise as the others had had in theirs. He recognized, without anger and almost without hurt, that he was the least loved child of his father, although without a doubt he was the most devoted. He recognized that where Old Roger thrilled to the ambition of Fan or Benjy, he shared with impatience the vision which had always possessed Joseph.

Why should Joseph care to leave the farm? He was a good farmer. How could he plan to leave his father and mother alone? Why didn't he marry plump pink-cheeked Betsy Hand and settle down? Joseph felt also—although this his father did not say—that he had been counted upon to preserve a home and a refuge for those gay improvident ones who had driven away.

No, he had had no sympathy from his father. Old Roger was too gentle and heedless really to fight his son's plan, but he showed a stubborn refusal to evince enthusiasm even now, when the pouch was full. His mother, as usual, had said nothing one way or another. She had helped him dry his herbs, how-

ever, and she had knitted him new socks for the trip. He had tried to talk things over with Betsy, a friendly girl whom he sometimes took to barn-raisings and church, but Betsy's interest had been poorly feigned. She, too, Joseph realized at last, wanted him to marry her and settle down in Cloudman.

No one had helped him. No one at all. There was not a soul in Cloudman but thought it a piece of foolishness for him to leave his father's farm and take his savings and go down river to learn to be a doctor. Yet he had persisted. He had clung with dogged patience to his plan.

Joseph's eyes were very soft as he lay looking into the flames. He had his dreams, although no one shared them. His camp-fire had shared them, the stars had shared them, on those lonely excursions of his. He saw himself with a trimly pointed beard, a gold watch and chain, a horse and carriage. He saw himself sternly controlling a fever, awed relatives of the patient looking on. He saw knives in his thin brown fingers, already so sure and adroit. He would be rich, famous, good, respected, planned Joseph.

Mrs. Angel spoke.

"There's an Indian coming," she said.

Old Roger put down his pen and Joseph lifted his head. In a moment they, too, heard the soft pad-pad of an Indian's footsteps. Mrs. Angel went to the door and opened it. "Hello, Cut Nose," she said.

"Letters," answered Cut Nose, "Indian boy bring

them on a pony. Mr. Postmaster Lewis ask me to bring yours to you. Maybe word of the Little One Who Sings Like a Thrush." Cut Nose was one of Jenny Lind's admirers.

The singing-master came forward in smiling excitement. There had been no mail since the river closed in the fall. And here was a letter from Steve and a letter from Benjy. Cut Nose padded away.

Steve's letter was sealed with purple and addressed with lavender ink in heavily shaded writing full of scrolls and curlicues. Joseph laughed aloud as he took it from his father.

"That Stevie! Putting on airs with us!" he said.

He read the missive aloud, holding it close to the candle. Steve and Virginie were married. He wished that his father and brothers and sisters could hear an opera. He had not slept for two days with excitement after the first one he heard. He, too, now sang there. He had only small parts, of course.

"I am very handsome in tights," he admitted naïvely.

Old Roger wiped his eyes. "It's no for long he'll be havin' sma' parts!" he cried. "Ah, there's music in me! And it's comin' oot in my bairns."

He took the letter from Joseph, turned it over in his hands.

"That Stevie!" chuckled Joe. He was very fond of his brothers. "Maybe he and his wife can get up to Chicago to see me!"

His face was still alight when he opened Benjy's letter. This too he started briskly to read aloud.

The twins' voices were changing. Fan was sick with a cold. The lumberjacks didn't care for music as they should . . .

There Joe's voice hung. His eye ran down the page, and he laid the letter abruptly on the table.

"They're out of money, Father. They need help again, money enough to bring them home for the winter."

"They need help?" said Old Roger. "They want to come hame?" He picked up the letter anxiously, drew it close to his faded blue eyes.

"There's nothing we can send," said the mother, speaking quickly. "But they'll get on somehow. Benjy can find work."

"Oh, Joseph has aplenty." Old Roger answered absently, still straining his eyes at the page.

"No!" cried Joseph. "No!" He was standing very stiff, endeavoring to master the trembling of his lips.

"Ye'll na' help your sisters?" asked his father, peering at him.

"No! I won't, I tell you!" cried Joseph, his voice high.

His fingers were tightly clenched, and he held himself very still, but his gaze darted about in jerky, desperate flights. Old Roger started to speak, but Joseph interrupted with a flood of wild pleading directed at them both.

"You know I have just enough to take me to Chicago. You know there's no chance to earn more—in Cloudman—in the winter. I sent them my ginseng money, or I could have gone last fall. I won't. Don't ask me!"

"Chicago!" stormed his father. "There's na' sense to that. You wouldna' leave your brothers and sisters there in the north?"

"They'd leave me here! Forever!" Joe flung back in a voice that was shrill and hard with bitterness.

"Yes, I'll gie ye the farm, Joe. Ye can marry wi' Betsy and bring her here." Old Roger's eyes beseeched him. He put out a trembling wrinkled hand. "You'll na' leave your mother and me alone in our auld age?"

Something snapped in Joseph. No use! He couldn't do it. Why had he been made with a heart so soft and weak? These people that he loved—they held him with chains of iron. He could never be free. Never. He knew it now.

His face streaming with tears, he took the pouch from his pocket. He handed it to his father and turned away. His mother followed him and put her hand on his arm. Since childhood she had not touched him in that fashion.

"I'll help you get the money again," she offered haltingly. "We'll begin the first thing in the spring."

"No, it's no use." Joe threw himself down by the fire. This time his head was in his arms.

IX

"A Yankee boy is trim and tall,
And never over fat, sir.
At dance or frolic, hop and ball,
As nimble as a rat, sir."

THE thin audacious music of the fife and drum frisked over the crowd gathered on Nicollet Island.

It was a festive crowd—The First Minnesota Volunteers, brave in their red shirts, black trousers and black felts; adoring girls in shaker hats and floating rainbow ribbons; children scampering breathlessly after the swords and epaulettes and spirited horses of the officers; older folks beaming with excitement. It was a festive crowd, although the day was in May of 1861. There is something undeniably festive about the beginning of a war.

Six months ago Minneapolis and St. Anthony had been emerging from their usual muddy spring. They had been looking forward to the river's opening, the arrival of new settlers, fresh food supplies. The Senate and the South were quarreling, to be sure, but that was nothing new. Then the still novel telegraph had brought the news of Sumter and shortly afterward the glorious intelligence that the first tender of

troops to the President had been made by Governor Ramsey of Minnesota, opportunely in Washington.

Enlistment had followed rapidly. Carriages began to stream from the towns by the Falls to Fort Snelling, where sons and brothers had been whisked. The young ladies of Miss Sigourney's Boarding School had been taken to view the soldiery. The making of needle-cases commenced.

Before May first, the regiment was full and mustered into service. The ridiculous and at first uncredited news that the term of enlistment was for three years instead of three months had caused the dropping out of a cautious few, but their boots had been quickly filled. And now, before its departure on this presumptive holiday, the gallant First was being entertained on Nicollet Island. No shadow of Gettysburg nor of Antietam darkened the smiling May sky.

The island was a bouquet of delicate spring colors. The waters of the Mississippi parted and rippled around it, and on either side of the stream a little town in gala dress did honors to the soldiers. The men had marched from Fort Snelling that morning, had performed their evolutions on the green before The Nicollet House in Minneapolis, had paraded through St. Anthony and had sat down to a memorable dinner on the Island. Captain Tapper had flung wide the gates of the suspension bridge. No toll should be demanded on this day of days. Every one

was happy, but particularly the children. There were soldiers. There was a band. There were to be speeches. And the black Angels from up the Minnesota were to sing.

One of the Angels had already enlisted and wore his red shirt with the rest of the soldiers. He was the oldest one and the leader of the troupe. The children, peering around the table at the gypsy-dark band of singers, found him—a theatrical figure with his violin in his hands. There was a little girl, her loose hair wreathed with flowers. There were two prancing boys. But where was the lady, the lovely lady, fragile as a dream, with whom all of the children were secretly in love?

Deep in the budding grove, which sheltered more than one pair of lovers that day, sat the lovely lady with a soldier at her feet. He was a properly adoring soldier who, nevertheless, had something afoot more important than adoring. His dark-blue eyes held a smoldering abstraction that the lady found odious.

She shook her head now vehemently, so vehemently as to disarrange the ringlets hanging, in the fashion of the Empress of France, on either side of her face.

"I don't *want* to be free. I *won't* be free," she said like a passionate child.

"Well, you *are* free. I should have had the courage to make you so when you went off with the troupe, but I didn't. I won't hold you now to a promise

which irked you before there was a chance of my losing an arm or a leg."

"I'll cry," said Fanny in a tiny voice and hooked her little finger into his.

David regarded the finger.

"You're far too thin, Fanny. You must get well and strong while I'm away."

"I can't if we aren't engaged, David. I'll worry about southern girls."

David laughed, a short, bitter laugh suggesting that torment that Fanny had so lightly forgotten. He snatched the finger to his lips, then dropped it and looked away.

"We'll all be back by autumn," he remarked with coerced calmness after a moment.

Fanny regarded him with a wistful expression which hid a turmoil of vexation. Why, she couldn't do a thing with him, not a thing, not with David whom she had always been able to wind about her finger!

And how handsome was his dark head above the red shirt! How stern that roughly hewn profile!

Again she hooked her finger seductively in his.

"What about the southern girls, David?"

"You know I couldn't care for one," he answered without looking at her. "I wish I could."

"You wish you could break Fanny's heart?" she asked in a whisper.

David did not reply.

They were silent for a moment and from the top of a May-fringed oak a brown thrasher executed his bravura aria.

"At least you'll not be singing," said David with satisfaction when the bird took flight. "Joseph won't be in. They won't be wanting married men. And he'll take the best care of you while Benjy's gone."

"Oh, but I shan't be home, David, I'll be traveling around with the children."

"You'll be . . . what?"

They stared into each other's eyes. There was no mistaking the surprised indignation of either.

"You won't be traveling around without Benjy?"

"Why, of course I will."

"It wouldn't be respectable."

"I'd die in Cloudman."

David shook off her finger and stood up.

"Yes," said Fanny icily, "we'd best be going. The singing comes after the speeches."

They walked a little way in silence through the woods, then David stopped.

"Would you . . . would you stay at home to please me, Fanny?"

"I'm sorry, I couldn't."

"Even if . . . we were engaged to each other?"

"No, David dear."

David caught her face tightly between his hands. He looked into her eyes a little wildly.

"Good-bye, then. It's all over. Thank God for the

war," he muttered incoherently, and flung away.

"David!" cried Fanny. But he did not turn.

Her eyes stinging with tears, Fanny went on to the clearing where the tables stood. After the soldiers had been fed the townspeople had feasted, and now Colonel Gorman had mounted a table.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of St. Anthony and Minneapolis," he began in a booming voice. Fanny darted toward her brothers and sisters, waiting under an elm; mechanically she answered their whispered queries, gave beautifying pats to Jenny Lind, turned her own ringlets over her finger.

How could she possibly sing, she wondered! There was an aching weight in her breast. The cause of the quarrel had faded to insignificance, but the longing for David racked her like a pain.

"In behalf of the First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers," Colonel Gorman boomed on, "I return to you our thanks for this very handsome and liberal entertainment. I have never known an occasion of this kind more appropriately conducted. Order has reigned, decorum has prevailed and propriety pervaded every arrangement."

David had joined his company, Fanny saw. His face was grim, but he was composed. He did not so much as look in her direction.

Colonel Gorman was followed by Mayor Merriman; Mayor Merriman by Colonel Aldrich. With each succeeding speech the war became more

glorious, the soldiery more noble, David more dear. Fanny watched him steadily, not missing a turn of his head nor a lift of his hand, but her thoughts fluttered like frantic birds.

They fluttered to Benjy, excused from the ranks until this concert was over. They fluttered to Steve, married to his Virginie, caught in the hostile South. They fluttered to Joseph—her father was growing very feeble and Joseph had taken over the farm. He hadn't much sense of adventure, Old Joe. He was interested in nothing but the baby that was coming. The troupers, who had finished the winter in Cloudman—swaggering good-naturedly along its humble streets—often chaffed him on his dogged domesticity.

In early spring they had returned to Minneapolis. The war news had caught them there. Since then they had been reaping a harvest at the Falls with the singing of patriotic songs. The Winslow House had closed. Enemies now were those debonnaire southerners from down the Mississippi, they who had promenaded so often on this same Nicollet Island.

This same Nicollet Island which was blazing with soldier shirts as Fanny and the others took their places! A palpable excitement rose from the milling crowd to the Angels, ranged on a knoll. Benjy, in a jocund shout, invited all to sing. He waved his bow aloft and swept it across his fiddle. Led by

Fanny's sparkling voice, the people joined in song—"America," "Hail Columbia" . . .

The music raced like fire through Fanny's blood. Sublime, to fight for the Union and the Flag! Heroes, these hardy, brown young volunteers from farm and camp and river. And not one of them was more the hero than her David. It was strange to feel for David such a tremor of the heart. He did not seem like David . . . he was new and somehow thrilling . . . standing so straight and resolute, half turned away.

The soldiers were being idolized in the eastern states, she heard. And she had seen for herself the languid southern beauties. And he had set her free and was going away . . . without asking a kiss. And then there swelled in Fanny a great and anguished something, something ready to shatter into a thousand sobs. She pressed her hands into her eyes and heard a sudden stillness, broken by Benjy's voice.

"By request," Benjy was saying, with his fiddle over his heart, "by request, Miss Fanny Angel will sing 'Ossian's Serenade.'"

"Ossian's Serenade"? But that was a love-song! "Ossian's Serenade"? Then here was her chance! Bowing, with picked-out skirts, she advanced down the knoll. She had a plan that set the red flags flying in her cheeks.

David was not looking, but she would make him

look. She would make him look. She would make him . . .

"Oh, come with me in my little canoe,
Where the sea is calm and the sky is blue,
Oh, come with me for I long to go,
To those Isles where the mango apples grow.

"Oh, come with me and be my love,
For thee the jungle depth I'll rove,
I'll gather the honeycomb bright as gold,
And chase the Elk to its secret hold."

Yes, that was a love-song. The vibrant tenderness in Fanny's voice drew many a girl closer to her lover. It turned David's head just a fraction of an inch. Fanny sang on:

"I'll chase the Antelope over the plain,
The Tiger's cub I'll bind with a chain,
And the wild Gazelle with its silvery feet,
I'll give thee for a playmate sweet."

David looked at her. Fanny's heart began to tap, tap, tap against her breast. She looked at David, her eyes great shining pools. Her voice soared to the ecstatic crescendo of the song.

"Oh, come if the love thou hast for me,
Is pure and fresh as mine for thee,
Fresh as the fountain underground,
When first 'tis by the Lapwing found.

"Then come with me in my light canoe,
While the sea is calm and the sky is blue,
For should we linger another day,
Storms may arise and love decay."

A hush. A hush, and then the clamor of several hundred soldier hands and half as many ardent soldier voices. Fanny did not grant the vociferously called-for encore. With her eyes still luminous and her honeysuckle mouth still trembling in a smile, she bowed her way backward out of the crowd. Behind the tree-trunks, she sped swiftly to the place where she and David had talked. He was there, white-faced and standing very stiff.

Fanny curled her arms about him, pressed her ringleted head against his breast.

"You won't go away engaged to me," she crooned in a little laughing voice. "No, don't give in," she ordered as he started to speak. She pressed a hand against his lips. "You won't go away engaged to me, and I'm at my wit's end."

She blew away from him, locked her hands behind her and lifted a saucy face.

"Perhaps you will go away married to me, David?"

As, still, he did not speak, but stood stiff and silent with the misery of more than a year written in his face, she came close and curled her arms about him again.

"Would I ask that if I didn't really love you?

Please, David dear! Chaplain Neill would do it. Lots are getting married. And Benjy's here."

She looked up into his dark-blue eyes which had lighted against his will . . . lighted with a deep rapture that told his thoughts. To marry her now! To have her for his own before *The War Eagle* carried him down river! Then a sudden anxious tenderness shot into his gaze.

"If we are married you will have to obey me, Fanny. And my first order will be . . . no trouping while I'm gone."

Fanny snapped two of the fingers which encircled his neck.

"That for trouping!"

"You would promise? Truly?"

"Oh, truly, truly!"

His arms caught her then, snatched her elusive little figure into an embrace which left her glowing.

"We'll go and find the Chaplain," said David, shortly, when at last he had freed her.

Fanny's twinkling feet kept pace with difficulty.

"Mrs.—David—John," she sing-songed as she went.

X

LIKE the round red face of a clown the sun ducked below the willows which edged the sandy river bank. Darkness did not follow immediately, however. Very slowly, the smoke-blue twilight absorbed the slender thread arising from the campfire. And then the red embers shone out.

Close to these embers, for the fall night was cool and the odor from the swinging kettle pleasant, gathered the black Angels. The war was fought, the Union saved, the negro freed . . . and the troupe was on the road again. The covered wagon was drawn up near the camp, oxen tethered to its pole. Railroads were building now, but the impecunious Angels did not yet aspire to the iron horse.

It was the same bedraggled covered wagon, but the group by the fire was changed. Benjy—to begin with him—had only one leg. Sheer luck, the Angels called it, that it was a leg he had lost. This, Benjy protested.

"It was the quill from our goose that I carried. Wish Stevie had had one."

Whether it was luck or no, he had lost only a leg and he still could play his beloved violin.

He could play his violin and sing in his rolling

bass. Older, he was, and bonier, and bearded, but the light in his eyes was the same. The light sprang from the plans that were ever turning cartwheels in his head, plans for leading his brothers and sisters to glory.

Benjy had one leg gone and Steve would never come back. He would never sing again his songs of a voyageur. He had, by stealth and violence, gained the northern army only to fall in the course of the first summer. Fanny was not there either. They had left her behind in Cloudman—a subdued and wistful Fanny, white and big eyed. A baby was coming, had doubtless come, though the travelers had no news. And David John had painted their cottage a dazzling joyous yellow.

The troupe missed Fanny sorely. Jenny Lind was grown, but her voice was light and she was not the prima donna type. This was the more unfortunate as Steve's Virginie was coming with the scores of "Martha," "Norma," "The Crown Diamonds" and "The Elixir of Love."

The Civil War had disorganized the opera in New Orleans. Her northern husband, too, had told against Virginie. She had written in distress and Joseph had sent money. He had courteously invited her to come to Minnesota.

She had answered with many pages of eager flowing script. Perhaps they could carry out a plan which she and Steve had made? Could they not change the

concert troupe into an opera troupe? Would not opera be welcomed in that country? Steve had said that the older sister had a marvelous soprano. Jenny Lind, *chère enfant*, could be their soubrette. She herself was a contralto and with the remaining brothers, could they not manage?

Of course the enraptured Angels assured her that they could. A pity Fan was married! As they journeyed from town to town they talked of little else but the imminent arrival of Virginie. They had left a letter for her at the Merchants' Hotel in St. Paul. She had been told to go there on landing from her steamer. They were keeping near St. Paul, and the letter had outlined their route, directing her to follow by stage or pony.

"When she comes we'll go back to St. Paul," Benjy was saying now, as they watched the stars shine out above Shakopee's Village. "We'll make our costumes there, such as she doesn't bring. She said that she'd manage to bring the hardest ones."

"It's pretty fine of Joe to stake us to this venture," Tommie observed in his newly acquired bass. The twins had been drummer boys in the last year of the war, emerging with stable voices and an excessive dignity.

"It was too bad of him, though, not to let us bring Joe Joe along." Jenny Lind was continually voicing this complaint. "He can sing and dance the hornpipe and he was wild to come. And we need two

children in 'Norma.' I don't know where we'll get them."

"Well, we couldn't expect Joe to let us bring his Joe Joe. Why, the child isn't four years old, and he's the apple of Joe's eye. Ssh! What's that?"

There was a rustle in the brush . . . the slow exploring sound of horse's hoofs.

"Virginie?" Benjy whispered. "I left word in the village . . ." But they did not start up at once with a welcoming shout. The outbreak of the Sioux was far too fresh in mind. Those friends of their childhood were dreaded outcasts now.

The exploring steps came nearer. A clear voice called.

"It is . . . it is Virginie!" Benjy hoisted himself to his feet.

Cantering down the beach came a horse with a girl rider. It continued boldly into their very midst.

Benjy cleared his throat, clapped his hand across his heart.

"Sister Virginie," he began in a ceremonial manner.

"It's not Virginie," returned a voice which was Fan's and yet was not. It was hard and brittle as glass. She slipped from her horse.

"Fan! Why, what's the matter? Is Mother . . . is Mother sick?" The Angels pressed about her, strained toward her face. Old Roger had died during the war; their mother missed him sorely; and some-

thing gave Fan's voice that chill repellent tone . . .

"No. No one is sick."

Tommie led her horse away. Timmie piled brush on the fire. Fanny sat down beside it, threw her sunbonnet aside and caught her knees tightly into her arms.

She had no bag, no bundle. She wore a thin calico dress with only an old tippet about her throat. Her posture was so rigid, her whole manner so strange, that even Benjy fumbled for words and a frightening silence fell.

"I must say you're glad to see me," Fanny said at last. And it seemed that the glassy voice might splinter to fragments.

"Of course we are," Benjy answered. "But why . . . why have you come? You haven't told us, Fan."

"Why shouldn't I come? Tell me that?" It was like the crack of a whip.

She looked from one to another, her eyes bright points of pain.

"Where do I belong, if I don't belong here?" she cried. "Not keeping house! Not tending baby! Not going to church socials and making wax flowers! I had sense enough at least to come where I belong, and now you ask 'Why?' 'Why?' "

The glass shattered at that. She threw her arms up wildly, then snatched her knees again and burst into sobs, great tearing sobs that shook her thin little

body, that echoed terribly along the lonely river.

The Angels flung their arms about her. They held her close, covered her bent head with kisses, and chafed her small icy hands. Not even a shawl! A wonder if she hadn't caught her death, Jenny Lind told Benjy, as the sobs grew soft and ceased and Fanny sat exhausted with her head on her sister's shoulder.

"Fanny, dear, you know we're glad," said Benjy then. "We need you so badly for our prima donna. Jenny Lind was terrified at the thought of singing 'Casta Diva.' But the baby . . . did the baby die, Fan?"

Fanny lifted her head with an effort.

"No," she answered. "No. I couldn't have run away from David if she had. And I did run away. I rowed up to Mankato and took the stage-coach there. And in St. Paul I got your letter for Virginie and found out your route and followed you."

She leaned toward them.

"No, the baby didn't die. And she will comfort David. She'll stay at home, and keep his house for him, and do all the things I couldn't do. She's going to be exactly like his family. I willed it so. I willed it all the time before she was born."

"Does she look like him?" asked Jenny Lind.

"That doesn't mean anything," said Fanny impatiently. "No, she's black like the rest of us."

The mixture in the kettle was boiling now.

"You must be starved!" cried Jenny Lind, jumping to her feet.

"Take my comforter. You're cold as a stone," said Benjy, wrapping it about her.

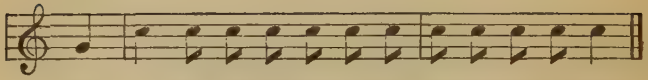
Fanny felt her throat with experimental fingers, ran up and down a sparkling scale and smiled. She leaned back then, watching the group busy in the firelight, listening to the stamping of the oxen and the soft night noises of the wood.

"I'm not terrified of the 'Casta Diva,' " she called.

"A little more salt," said Benjy.

"I've been working at it all summer. I've a splendid high F at the end."

She began contentedly humming to herself the invocation of the goddess.

PART TWO

And so do his sis-ters and his cousins and his aunts.

—From *H. M. S. Pinafore*
GILBERT & SULLIVAN

XI

THE blizzard of eighteen seventy-three is a legend now in Minnesota.

Until Tuesday, the seventh of January, when the storm closed down like a trap upon the southern part of the state, the winter had been a mild one. Local newspapers were engaged in a pleasurable controversy with California regarding climate; they were gibing delightedly at the eastern states which were seeing tempestuous weather. In Cloudman there had been scarcely snow enough for sleighing. Ducks had been sighted on Blue Lake. There were four baptisms in the Minnesota River on the Sunday preceding the storm.

The morning of Tuesday was particularly balmy. The softness of spring was in the air, and many farmers took advantage of the day to discharge their errands in town. About eleven o'clock great wet flakes began to fall. They persisted languidly until early afternoon. Then, without warning, the storm swooped down in a fury of wind and darkness. The old voyageurs, from whom the word "blizzard" has descended, would wisely have sought shelter where they stood. They knew the treachery of these sudden blinding gales. But the settlers had yet to learn it.

They pressed anxiously toward home . . . seventy of them to death, and hundreds to disaster.

One newly married couple, to be sure, overturned their sleigh and dwelt happily beneath it for two days. A dearly loved bishop said his prayers, crept under his buffalo robes and was taken to safety by his horses. Numerous cows and pigs burrowed in the snow and were rescued alive after surprising intervals. These stories may be believed, and are not to be classed with those heralded by the jubilant eastern papers. Men were stepping over the drifted tops of the telegraph poles in St. Paul, the Chicago *Times* declared. A feather bed in Duluth had been frozen stiff as a pudding, chortled the New York *Tribune*. Such tales as these, Minnesota indignantly repudiated.

The first night of the storm marked the first night of her life that Angel John had been away from her father. She was in school when the snow thickened. The teacher prudently ordered the Wilson's readers closed and, after a hurried conference with the principal, announced that her small third-graders might go home. But before she had them bundled into their sacques and hoods, the wind had risen. A fearful parent had rushed in, and, noticing Angel—people always noticed Angel, those blue jewels of eyes in a dark face and that dark, straight-hanging cloak of hair—she had said:

"The little John girl can never get home. I'll take her with me."

A message was sent by the child who went nearest the John household. By this time parents were flocking in. Small icy bits were rattling against the panes, and lamps were lighted throughout the schoolhouse, giving it an eerie look at three in the afternoon. Angel was tremendously excited. Dancing from Mrs. Walker's hand, she offered a flow of extravagant suggestions and grimaced ecstatically at little Debbie Walker who dangled on the other side of her kindly mother's bustle.

She could never have reached home. That was soon abundantly proven. And her father could not get through to her. That was no less sure. From behind the Walkers' windows they peered out into darkness, darkness completely filled with madly whirling flakes. The temperature was dropping. Mrs. Walker tied a clothes-line to the woodshed door. Mr. Walker ventured out to bring in extra fuel and do what he could for the luckless horse and cow.

But to stay all night with the Walkers was delicious adventure. Angel disregarded the prickings which reminded her of her father's anxiety. What a novelty to eat bread and milk behind the kitchen stove! To undress in the same cozy niche and have one's hand-embroidered petticoats admired! To be laughed at as "a little princess" because one insisted

upon washing one's face and hands before going to bed! To wear a borrowed nightgown and snuggle with another child into a trundle bed, pulled out from beneath a big one! She knew that Mrs. Walker's Blazing Star quilt had been taken from the clothes-press for her sake. She sensed pleasingly that her visit was adventure to the Walkers, too. She took pains to make her manners elegant as Mrs. Walker sat in the cradle chair, nursing the baby and talking to her.

It was all rapturous until the moment for her prayers. It was the first night within her memory that her father had not come to her bedside. Tall, sober, bearded—he seemed very old to Angel, although he was only in the middle thirties—he always listened to her prayers and then put a kiss on her forehead.

Angel hated that kiss. It kept her, somehow, from throwing her arms about him.

"I'm *glad* he's worried!" she thought fiercely now. If he hadn't loved her . . . but she knew he loved her! Why wouldn't he show it as her Uncle Joseph did?

"I love Uncle Joseph best," Angel sometimes told herself passionately. But, young as she was, she knew this wasn't true. Only, her love for her Uncle Joseph was all happiness, and her love for her father was mysteriously pierced with pain. Sometimes when she surprised him watching her, the look in his eyes

embarrassed and distressed her. She felt she had stumbled upon something she was not supposed to see. It weighed upon her heart, that look, as she lay wakeful with Debbie Walker's knees braced against her back.

The dark room showed just the bright cracks of the stove. The wind prowled, wailing, around the cottage. If she herself had brought about the storm, Angel could not have felt more forlornly guilty.

"I didn't need to have been *glad,*" she whispered from an aching throat. Tears began to drip into her pillow.

When Mr. Walker rose sepulchrally to add wood to the fire, or Mrs. Walker to hush the baby, Angel stuffed the corner of a blanket in her mouth. She wouldn't have them think that she was homesick . . . an ordinary little girl.

In the morning all this receded like a dream. Her situation was once more enchanting. The storm had closed down about them, foglike; they could not see a wood-pile, less than twenty feet away. Lighted by a pallid glow, the day passed strangely. Mr. Walker did not go to his harness shop; the children did not go to school. It seemed like a new sort of Sunday with no church, and Angel felt it incumbent on herself to entertain them.

After she had politely volunteered to sing, she wondered if she had been forward. Such a queer look slipped from Mrs. Walker to her husband.

"Oh, you know how to sing, do you?"

Angel laughed. Know how to sing!

"Somebody told me," explained Mrs. Walker hastily, "that you didn't have an organ at your house."

"My father is not fond of music," said Angel haughtily. Her lack of an organ was a sore matter to her, but she would not betray that.

"Of course," soothed Mrs. Walker, "your Pa could afford to buy a dozen organs if he wanted to. You've learned to sing in school, I suppose?"

"Oh, my cousins at the farm are always singing. We are," added Angel, with her best imitation of her Aunt Dora's manner, "a very musical family."

Again that queer look slid from one grown-up to another. Then Mr. Walker said quickly:

"Well, what will you sing?"

" 'Father, Dear Father, Come Home'?" suggested Angel. "Of course, that's very sad. Or there's 'Co-ca-che-lunk-che-lunk-che-laly' that we learned in school. Debbie and I could sing that together."

She greatly preferred to sing alone, but she was always polite to other children.

To her satisfaction, Mr. Walker had a taste for the melancholic.

"Let's have 'Father, Dear Father,' " he decided.

Angel advanced to the center of the room, a pretty child in a lace-trimmed apron. A moment later, to the startled simple Walkers, she had grown

ragged and thin. Crouching as from an expected blow, plucking with futile fingers at her apron, Angel felt a sweet thrill of power. She couldn't make Debbie like her, perhaps, but she could hold her in a round-eyed trance.

"I can make her cry!" she thought triumphantly.

"Father, dear father, come home with me now,
The clock in the steeple strikes one;
You said you were coming right home from the shop
As soon as your day's work was done.
Our fire has gone out, our house is all dark
And mother's been waiting since tea,
With poor brother Benny so sick in her arms
And no one to help her but me."

She did, indeed, cause Debbie to blubber, and Mr. Walker was heard later to assert:

"If I didn't know for a certainty that Lawyer John never touches a drop, I'd swear that young one had fetched him from Dick-Star's saloon. I would, now."

Mrs. Walker, wiping her eyes, suggested "Grandpa's Spectacles" or "I Like Little Pussy" as more suitable to the age of the singer.

"They're no fun, ma'am," said Angel. She gave them instead "We Shall Meet but We Shall Miss Him," and was mournfully concluding when a powerful stamping on the front stoop broke through the racket of the storm.

"Jackson must have got through!" shouted Mr. Walker.

"It's my father!" cried Angel. And so it was. The opening storm-door brought a blast of bitter wind, a volley of stinging flakes and a tall man whose fur cap and overcoat, mustache and beard were glazed with ice.

Angel jumped into his arms. She was not so glad to see him as her impetuosity might indicate—the concert had been extremely agreeable—but she knew what was due a rescuing hero, and she gave it. That her father had approached a miracle in reaching her was evidenced by the cries of amazement and admiration with which the Walkers encircled him.

David John said nothing to the Walkers or to her. He caught her to his breast, crushed his face down upon her hair. In a moment, however, he was calmly removing his overcoat, with apologies for the melting snow, resting against the door-jamb and rehearsing in a few belittling words his difficulties in reaching them. He had come the previous night as far as Jackson's. All day he had been making abortive attempts to get from that neighboring house to this one.

"I'll have to ask your hospitality now for both of us, Mrs. Walker. Angel and I couldn't get to your front gate, I'm afraid."

"Indeed, you'll not try. I'll put on the coffee pot this instant," said Mrs. Walker, bustling off.

She called Angel after her and said in a low voice, "Don't tell your father what we were doing."

Angel was annoyed. Did Mrs. Walker know, did all Cloudman know that her father disliked her singing?

"My own aunts and uncles are opera singers, I guess," she said defiantly.

But she didn't tell him. She knew well enough that it was inadvisable.

Flattered and impressed by his arrival, she hung about his chair for a while, but he paid no further attention to her. And his presence there quite outshone her own. She played disconsolately at paper dolls with Debbie while the grown people talked about the storm. Business was at a stand-still in the town, her father said. The telegraph reported that not a locomotive in the state was moving. A train was blockaded just out of Cloudman with passengers imprisoned in the cars, and a desperate attempt was being made to send them supplies.

"Joe Angel will be worried. His brother, Tom, is on that train."

Mrs. Walker nodded understandingly, and Angel pricked up her ears. She had heard Aunt Betsy say that Aunt Dora was "expecting," but she hadn't thought she was expecting Uncle Tom. Indeed, she had suspicioned it was a baby. Her aunts came frequently to Uncle Joseph's farm, and Dr. Gerlach promptly brought them babies. It seemed curious,

but it always happened so. Then their husbands came for them, and they went back to the troupe, sometimes taking the babies along but more frequently leaving them for a period with Aunt Betsy.

That was what made Uncle Joseph's farm such fun. Besides Joe Joe, Sadie, Flora, Roger and Mary Lou, who belonged to Uncle Joseph and Aunt Betsy, there were Uncle Tom's Norma, Uncle Tim's Violetta and Stevie, and Aunt Jenny Lind's Baby Jack. Aunt Betsy had, she often said, as many children as the old woman who lived in a shoe. She took cheerful care of all of them. And to Angel, in the big lonely dwelling on Willow Street, life at the farm ran as merrily as the rhyme.

No news of Uncle Tom could, of course, get through to them. The house was islanded completely; and, for that matter, the telegraph was doubtless crippled now. The storm roared without abatement, and the little girls grew bored and fractious while the men talked endlessly of the problem of the granges, of the wood-pile thieves and of the Fisk Stokes murder trial.

On Friday the day broke clear. It was blue and white and gold as a Christmas chromo with sunlight splintering itself upon the drifts. Mrs. Walker made buckwheat cakes; Angel and Debbie embraced, forgetting their squabbles; and, after discarding the jingling cutter, which could make no headway on

the billowy streets, Angel departed in her father's arms.

It was elating to sway on his shoulder while he wallowed through the snow, to shout greetings to those townsmen who were already out with shovels, to see the freakish things the storm had done. Their solemn red brick and limestone house was festooned with white in the gayest manner. Fritz, the hired man, who was shoveling down the walk, tossed her a snowball, and Mrs. Tinkcom waved from the bow windows.

But Angel didn't want to go in. She wanted to play "gee up" with her father. She wanted to join the laughing children who were "making angels" in the snow. That, of course, was not permitted. Her high spirits quenched, she dragged down the lofty hall into the back parlor which was warm and dim and smelled of Mrs. Tinkcom's geraniums. She was bathed, put into clean clothes and stationed at the window where she looked out wistfully upon the fun. And that was the end of the blizzard of eighteen seventy-three.

But not quite the end for Angel. Several nights later she was awakened by a banging and bumping in the lower hall. Light floated up to her, and, cold as it was, she slipped out of bed and ran to look over the banisters. Her father was standing there, and Uncle Joseph, and tears were running down Uncle

Joseph's face, so that Angel did not call out to him, although she had not seen him since the storm and had a hundred questions to ask. A small trunk was standing between them, a gay little trunk with brass-headed nails along the top and a red strap around it.

"Father," quivered Angel.

Her father strode up the steps and took her in his arms. He carried her down, a white wisp against his shoulder.

"Your mother is dead."

Angel tightened her arms about his neck.

"Where was my mother?"

"Dave," said Uncle Joseph, "you shouldn't have told the wee one at night."

But her father answered, "She was on the train with your Uncle Tom, it seems, and sick, and the exposure was too much for her."

"Was she coming home to see me?" asked Angel.

After a moment, her father said, "Undoubtedly." But Angel knew from his tone that he did not believe she was.

Her mind went over the simple facts as the fingers of the blind over a face. Although she had been told that she had "lost" her mother, she had always known, somehow, that her mother was not dead. But she had never thought of her being with the troupe. If she had been with the troupe, why hadn't she, too, come back to Uncle Joseph's farm and had

babies? Little fat babies who would have been brothers and sisters . . .

Angel burst into tears against her father's shoulder.

And then she heard, close above her head, a cry so dry and terrible that she started up. She never forgot the face with which her father handed her to Uncle Joseph. His study door crashed behind him, and Uncle Joseph cuddled her and woke Mrs. Tinkcom and told her that Angel was to sleep in her arms.

Next morning the gay little trunk was gone from the hall. Her father was gone too and Angel was kept indoors. She had a cold, Mrs. Tinkcom insisted.

She found what she sought, at last, in a cave-like corner of the attic.

Envisioning her father's agonized face, she pounded the little trunk with her fists. Then, crying, she stumbled toward the stairs.

But when she looked back, the brass nails were twinkling there in the gloom, the red strap was shining . . . it seemed a gallant, lovable little trunk.

"I don't care! I *don't* love you!" Angel shouted at it through her tears.

XII

THE Angel farm was nearer to Cloudman than David John may have wished. In Old Roger Angel's day, indeed, the cottage had been within the village limits, but the coming of the railroad had changed that. Railroads cracked the whip in those days, and towns jumped into position like trained dogs. Cloudman fell into a double file of streets on either side of the river and left Roger Angel's cottage—together with a three-story brick hotel which had been opened with a Grand Gift Ball before the war—stranded in the country.

Joseph Angel didn't seem to mind. While his neighbors were carving their farms into building-lots and getting rich in the process, he continued contentedly to raise wheat and corn. Eventually, to protect himself from marauding boys, he bought the abandoned hotel. This battered brick edifice was a paradise to the Angel children; and it had a practical value in the summer of 'seventy-three, for in that summer, it must be confessed, the troupe "came home on its trunks."

What troupe, indeed, brooked the panic of 'seventy-three? That was the year when post-war prosperity, blended of railroad building and bonanza

farming, speculation and immigration, flattened down like an omelette, taken too soon from the fire. Ushered in by the blizzard, the year was further tormented by grasshoppers—locusts, they were in reality, but not yet identified—which came in a curdled cloud out of the west, late in June. They settled on the Angel farm at three in the afternoon and by evening not a sign of green was left. They ate the young wheat, the tops of the corn, the new garden, the leaves from the trees. They passed on, of course, and the farmers took heart, not knowing the menace of the buried eggs. But even without that knowledge, the summer was gloomy enough.

The troupe came home in August. As they descended from the train in the noon blaze of the sun, they presented to a dazzled Cloudman anything but a picture of misfortune. The long-tailed coats of the brothers may have been a trifle rusty, but the ends of their mustaches pointed to the sky. The women with their small flat bonnets tipped over their faces, their huge bulbous chignons, their overdresses caught up with rosettes and flowing out over protruding "dress improvers" in the back, fairly exuded Chicago. Cloudman stood transfixed. It was hardly able to respond to the amenities which bubbled from the visitors . . . "Why, Ben Rucker!" . . . "Little Jane Scattergood, sure as I'm alive!" . . . "Remember the day we played hookey?"

They went to the Union House. They didn't take

rooms, of course, or stay to dinner. That would be foolish, for as soon as Old Joe heard . . . and, indeed, within the hour Old Joe was there. He seemed genuinely glad to see them, although their arrival was completely unexpected. There was much kissing and embracing and clapping on the back; and they clambered in high spirits into his vehicles—the men into a wagon, the women into a carriage, the latter driven by a shining-faced Joe Joe.

Angel saw them from her gate, and, recognizing the carriage, she ran out to the street.

"It's Fanny's little girl," some one explained.

The procession stopped, at that, and she was caught into a series of squeezes.

She was struck by her Aunt Virginie whom she had never seen before. Two long auburn curls came out of her chignon to lie on either shoulder, and she had a lovely tired face. But Angel liked her Uncle Benjy best. He had such twinkling eyes and only one leg. He wanted to take her along to the farm until Uncle Joseph said firmly:

"Not unless Dave says so. Is your father anywhere about?"

"No, he isn't and I *want* to go." Angel was rigid, starry eyed with pleading. Uncle Joseph, however, put her down determinedly.

"Joe Joe will drive in for you to-night."

Joe Joe came, but Angel did not return with him. Aunt Betsy, her father said, had company enough.

Joe Joe came the next day, but again returned alone. The weather was too warm. Angel's eagerness changed at last to feverish despair. Wasn't she to see the troupe at all? Didn't her father understand that she wanted to be an opera singer, herself, when she grew up?

Rumors drifted through the high iron fence, tantalizing as odors from a Christmas morning kitchen. The family was calling itself Angelo instead of Angel. Indeed, chuckled Cloudman, they were black enough to be Italians. They were "stone broke" and Joe was having a hard time raising money for them, since the blizzard had frozen his stock and the hoppers eaten his corn. Benjy was teaching the violin, Tom singing, and Mrs. Tim Angel, dancing. They had quite a parcel of pupils, too. Meanwhile, mosquito netting had been tacked on the windows of the old hotel, odds and ends of furniture moved in, and a pianoforte sent out from Cloudman, for they were practicing every day.

Angel always suspected that her Uncle Joseph interceded for her. He came one evening to see her father, and the following morning she drove away with Joe Joe on the high spring seat of the wagon.

Joe Joe was Angel's favorite of all her cousins. He was particularly handsome, even for an Angel—a slim, straight, black-eyed little fellow who treated her with a lovely instinctive gallantry. He was a gentle, very affectionate boy. Angel, perhaps,

dominated on occasions. But she paid respectful tribute to his sex and years, and they got on happily together.

She was very happy now. The bliss of wearing her best white dress, her leghorn bonnet and her Roman sash! And her father had requested her to dress so, though commonly she went to the farm in her apron. She bounced even more giddily than the rough roads necessitated and pelted her cousin with questions.

"Uncle Benjy, now. Has he got a wife?"

"No. He's an old bach."

"But Uncle Tim has Aunt Nuncy. Annunziata! Isn't that a funny name?"

"She's an Italian. So is Aunt Jenny Lind's husband."

"What's Italian, Joe Joe?"

"Why, you know what Italy is. Bananas come from there, and music."

"It must be a lovely country," sighed Angel, gazing across the field which the hoppers had left desolate.

"They're having," continued Joe Joe, "a fine time in the old hotel. Uncle Benjy says he'd like to give opera there. Fix it up and have folks come from all over the state, even from Minneapolis and St. Paul."

"Oh, Joe Joe! Wouldn't that be fun? Maybe they'd let us children sing."

"Of course," said Joe Joe, "he's just planning.

It would take a heap of money." He twisted about on the wagon seat, searched down the empty road and bent mysteriously toward her.

"Angel! Do you want to know a secret?"

"Of course I do."

"I'm going to ask Pa to let me go with the troupe."

"Joe Joe!" Angel clasped her hands; released them to throw her arms about him.

"Well, they could use me. I asked Uncle Benjy and he said so. They could use my buck and wing dance as an afterpiece—Master Joseph Angelo, they'd call me. And they could use me to take tickets and sing in the chorus. And I'm older than Aunt Jenny Lind was when she first went trouping."

"Oh, Joe Joe!"

"Of course," he explained hastily, "Pa may not let me go. I haven't asked him yet."

"He'll let you do anything."

"Well . . . if it was Sadie wanted to go . . . but you know, Angel, he's always said I was to be a doctor."

"But you don't *want* to be a doctor. Oh, Joe Joe, just as quick as I grow up, I'm coming too."

"Will you help me to tease Pa?"

"Of *course* I will."

Their small brown hands locked on the wagon seat. Smiling and silent, they breasted the gentle slope which brought the farmhouse into view. It was

a low, ample, white cottage that held Grandpa Angel's cabin somewhere in its embrace. Uncle Joseph had often told Angel of that cabin, of the farm which had come to him title clear—from God to the Indians, from the Indians to the United States Government and from the United States Government to Roger Angel. The cottage was shabby and needed paint, but sunflowers rioted about it—sunflowers, children and music—and the latter two of these raced out to meet Angel as she alighted, from the wagon.

A stirring chorus came from the old hotel.

"Victory! Victory! Heaven be our shield.
Victory! Victory! They all must yield."

The harmonized voices were accompanied by marching feet and an accented banging on the pianoforte. A violin in the agonies of practice wailed from the cottage. A cornet blared from behind the chicken-house. That was Sadie, the children screamed to Angel. Uncle Tom had given her a cornet, and some day she was going to play in a band. Wear a uniform with brass buttons. Yes, she was. Ask her.

Even before Angel had spread her white petticoats upon the doorstep, she was overwhelmed with news. Did she remember the funny Cat Duett that the Praeger family had sung in Cloudman? Well, Aunt Jenny Lind had taught it to Violetta and

Norma. They meowed just like cats and pinned paper tails to their dresses.

"We'll do it for you, Angel," they volunteered.

Angel writhed. She didn't want to hear it. Why hadn't *she* been at the farm to learn duets, to receive a cornet, and to hit upon a brass-buttoned future?

"Let's go to the hotel," she suggested.

"We dassn't. They're rehearsing."

"Wouldn't they let me peek when I'm only here for a day?"

The welling tears in Angel's eyes went to Joe Joe's soft heart. He ran for Aunt Betsy who came out from the kitchen to greet Angel as tenderly as though nieces and nephews were precious rarities in a leisured life. She despatched Flora—plump and red cheeked like herself—to the hotel, and Flora came back with word that Angel might be admitted. Whereupon the others formed a lively bodyguard. Except for Flora, all were lively and black as crickets.

A rehearsal was, indeed, in progress in the bare and echoing foyer. Uncle Benjy was pounding the pianoforte, and Aunt Jenny Lind, Aunt Nuncy and Giovanni Marino were shouting things at each other in music. Half in delight and half in terror, Angel tugged at Joe Joe.

"You come too. Please!"

"See Uncle Timmie?" Joe Joe pointed to the

tall young man who was striding restlessly back and forth. "He comes on next. He's the robber, Fra Diavolo. It's him the opera's named for."

But Uncle Benjy with a rap on the pianoforte cried out that they would cut to "Yes, To-morrow." Aunt Jenny Lind took the center of the stage. Aunt Virginie, who was sewing on a pile of tinselly material, beckoned Angel and Joe Joe to her side, and they nestled eagerly among the glittering folds as Aunt Jenny Lind began to sing:

> "Yes, to-morrow, yes, to-morrow,
> I am to be married . . ."

Aunt Jenny Lind had a fluting voice. She was a slight, pretty little thing, and she went daintily through the charming scene of Zerlina's going to bed. But her sweet notes might have been so many arrows for the pain they shot into Angel. Angel never forgot that aria, never heard it afterwards without a sick delicious tremor.

Yet she did not know until years later the reason for this rehearsal, did not understand that Jenny Lind with a heavy heart was singing what Fanny had so often and often sung. Angel's pain sprang from her own longing. Oh, to be a singer like Aunt Jenny Lind! Only, better; far, far better!

"Joe Joe," she breathed when the scene was ended, "will it take me very long to grow up?"

"Not very long. Why, you're in the third grade. Angel, do you think Pa will let me?"

"Of *course* he will."

After dinner, rehearsal continued. Flushed of face, curled on a pile of boxes in the corner, Angel heard for the first time the merry music of "Fra Diavolo." She heard "On Yonder Rock Reclining" and "Sweet Agnes, Beauteous Flower" and "Proudly and Wide, My Standard Flies"—music as far removed from "Father, Dear Father, Come Home," as she was from Willow Street to-day. When at last Uncle Benjy struck the G flat minor chord—he always ended rehearsal so, for that chord invoked good luck, he averred—Angel rose to her feet not quite steadily, feeling as she had felt when she first walked after the fever.

Uncle Benjy halted her, pushed back her cloak of hair and kissed the tiny mole which marked the tip of her smile.

"Little black puss! She's very like Fanny."

"Except for her eyes. What eyes!" said Uncle Tom, standing near.

Angel ran out into the barnyard. The world was filled with a soft rosy light. She felt that she was running in a dream, might easily run up into the sunset. The children called to her and she asked for Joe Joe. He could understand what she was feeling. The others would only laugh, as Flora was laughing now at the look in her face.

"He's out in the wood-lot with Pa."

To the wood-lot, then, Angel sped. She must find Joe Joe. Was it her joy or the ends of her sash which flew out behind her as she ran? Then she saw them ahead—Joe Joe standing with his hands behind him, Uncle Joseph leaning on his ax. She had forgotten! She who had promised to help tease!

Not that it mattered, she reflected as she ran. Darling Uncle Joseph! He never refused anybody anything. He was the kindest person, and handsome, too, with his pointed black beard. He looked like a lord, in spite of his crimson neck-cloth. But the face which danced before Angel's eyes as she ran was not the one she confronted in the wood-lot. Uncle Joseph was unmindful of her, seemed not to see her, even, and his look was terrifying.

"By God, no!" Uncle Joseph was saying. "Any one of them but you! Any one of them! But my son, my first son, Joseph Angel. You'd be Joseph Angelo, would you? Would you?"

Joe Joe—he was only a little boy and a very gentle one—began to cry. Uncle Joseph bent down and folded him in his arms. Angel thought Uncle Joseph was crying too.

"My little lad! You'll go to school and make me proud of you? You'll be a doctor like I want?"

Joe Joe was crying bitterly.

"You'll not go off and be a tramp, a trouper?"

Joe Joe stopped crying. His small tender arms

struggled to encircle his father. Watching his face, Angel was reminded of Uncle Joseph's face. Joe Joe's had for an instant that faithful sacrificing look.

"I won't, Pa. Don't cry," she heard him pleading.

Angel crept off into the wood. She put her arms about a big oak tree and pressed her soft face to the rough bark. Something was swelling and swelling inside her. It tightened her best white dress across her breast. The rosy glow had faded into a lonesome evening, a very lonesome evening in the country.

XIII

"IN the shadow of the locust plague, whose impending renewal threatens desolation of the land, let us humbly invoke for the efforts we make in our defense the guidance of that hand which alone is adequate . . ."

The phrases of Governor Pillsbury's proclamation boomed from Reverend Powell's lips. They boomed through the little church, filled to its last hard bench with rigid anxious people. They boomed through the open windows into the churchyard where scores more of men, women and children listened in the April sunshine.

For four successive summers the hoppers had harried Minnesota. Now they rose from the ground where the eggs had been laid the year previous. Again they came in a dense cloud, heralded by telegraph. "Hoppers headed toward Cloudman. Should arrive about eleven." And in fact before noon they would have settled on the fields. They ate everything. Joseph Angel claimed that they nibbled the edges of his scythes.

The farmers had battled them courageously. They had dug ditches about their fields; they had dragged their lands with sheet iron and tar; they had burned

windrows of moistened hay; they had plowed, replowed, harrowed. But what could they do against such whirring multitudes as had sufficed on one occasion to stop a train? Every year the hoppers had prevailed. Every year more people had gone hungry. And every year more farms had been abandoned, more discouraged faces had turned eastward.

The silence that gripped the crowded little church told the story of this suffering. It justified the day of prayer to which the governor had summoned Minnesota. Angel, sitting tense between her father and Aunt Betsy, fancied she could see the prayers going up like candle flames from the tops of people's heads. She wished she were a Catholic. It was difficult to pray well sitting up.

She squeezed her small gloved fingers into her eyes and did her best, however. She evoked first a white-bearded, gold-crowned image of God, but him she rejected. She addressed herself passionately to the handsome brown-eyed youth with the shepherd's crook who dwelt in the stained-glass window.

"Oh, Christ!" she prayed, not listening to the preacher. "Oh, Christ! take away the hoppers!"

Memory pointed an accusing finger. That covered wagon which had passed through Cloudman with a sign—"Cleaned Out by Hoppers"—painted on its sides. Why hadn't she run out to those children whose half-starved faces had peered through the

flaps and given them her French merino or at least some ginger cookies?

"Oh, Christ!" she prayed, tears rising. "Please forgive me! Please take away the hoppers!"

And why hadn't she helped to catch hoppers? Joe Joe, Sadie, Flora—all the children were catching them. The state was paying a dollar a bushel for them. But she had hated their squirming.

"I should have tried to catch some, oh, Christ! Not for the dollar either."

A hymn was announced. Angel got to her feet, dazed and blinking. Her prayer rolled on in her mind, and she looked absently down the long line of cousins which stretched from Aunt Betsy to Uncle Joseph. Not one of them, she was sure, had prayed so hard as she. Why, she had cried! Flora, she knew, had been chiefly impressed by the day of prayer because it meant a holiday from school.

"A *holiday,* oh, Christ!" scoffed Angel.

Joe Joe at the organ with a generous use of pedal struck the opening chords. Led by the row of little Angels, the congregation lifted its voice in song.

> "From every stormy wind that blows,
> From every swelling tide of woes,
> There is a calm, a sure retreat,
> 'Tis found beneath the mercy seat."

The music started Angel's tears again. It sent cold shivers racing through her body.

"Please, Christ!" she whispered. "Please take away the hoppers . . ." Whose head was that, down front, across the aisle?

It was a head of red hair, dark, glossy, admirably in order. It was a boy's head, set very high and proudly atop a tall slim body. It turned about with light-hearted arrogance. It made Angel think of a swan. Cloudman knew itself inside and out, and here was obviously a stranger.

He stood between a small, unfashionable woman and a man with sharp, narrow shoulders. The man stood on the aisle and Angel could see the grayish beard which rimmed his chin from ear to ear. The end of the hymn jolted her back to grasshoppers.

"Please take them away, oh, Christ," she murmured absently. But as she sat down again, settling her ribbons for the sermon, she tilted another glance at that bright head.

Reverend Powell took for his text a verse from Exodus: "And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt."

This sounded promising. Angel knew that the hoppers were locusts, Rocky Mountain locusts. Would the Lord really bring up a wind and cast them into the Minnesota River? But the Reverend Powell's claim was merely that the Lord could do it if he cared to. Her thoughts wandered.

She planned her wedding dress. (Even small girls of eleven and a half know how to occupy sermon time.) It was a tight, cream-colored silk, very, very tight about the knees. Aunt Jenny Lind, so Cloudman had claimed on her last visit, bound her knees together in order not to split her skirt when she stepped into a carriage. In former dreams this dress had figured on the concert stage. But how amenable dreams are! Angel transformed it now with a creamy white veil and floated down the aisle beside a swan-like red head.

Now and then, as she planned, a sentence from the sermon exploded near her. Startled, she murmured, "Please take away the hoppers, oh, Christ!" and returned to the dress.

The sermon was over. A little more praying, a little more hymning, and meeting was over too. The fate of the hoppers was with God, and Deacon Rowe was approaching her father with—Angel's heart scurried.

"Brother John, this is Brother Wickersham. Brother Wickersham is a faithful worker from Ohio, come out to join this community and our little flock. And Sister Wickersham, Brother John. . . ."

The children, of course, were not introduced.

Angel smiled up at the boy, glad of her kid gloves.

"My name's Angel," she said.

"Mine's Alex," he returned, smiling down at her. He was about the age of Joe Joe, sixteen years. He

held his head, Angel thought, as if he owned the church and everything in it; and his eyes, bright light-blue eyes, danced all the while like snowflakes. But not quite all the while . . .

"Alex Wickersham?" Angel asked innocently.

"No, Alex Webb. She's my mother, but he isn't my father. Not by a long shot, he isn't."

Angel looked at the man toward whom the boy's head jerked. That half-moon beard leaves a mouth particularly bare. And Mr. Wickersham's mouth could not afford to be left bare. It was too thin and tight. Angel didn't like him, and she suspected that she heard more courtesy than liking in her father's voice.

"You're hardly settled yet, I suppose?"

"Well, no. We only moved in yesterday. And we wanted to observe your day of prayer . . ."

"Won't you come home to dinner with us? We're enjoined to fasting to-day, but we don't take that so literally as our Catholic friends. My housekeeper is preparing a light meal, and we would be pleased to have you join us—you and Mrs. Wickersham and your son. . . ." He acknowledged the boy's presence with a smile.

"Mrs. Wickersham's son," corrected Mr. Wickersham unpleasantly.

As the party moved toward the door, Angel pulled at her father's arm.

"Joe Joe, you remember, is coming to dinner too."

"So he is. Well, you three children walk, and I'll take Mr. and Mrs. Wickersham in the carriage."

"Joe Joe," Angel explained as she and Alex retraced their steps, "is my cousin who plays the organ."

"I was wondering who that boy was," said Alex eagerly. "I play the organ myself, and the piano, and the violin—anything I can get my hands on."

"Do you?" cried Angel. "Why, I'm a singer! An opera singer! That is, I'm going to be as soon as I grow up."

Alex laughed at her, but he did it delightfully. He was as delightful with small girls as, Angel suspected, he could be with big ones. Millie Star, Vina Scattergood, Eva Mary Cole—young ladies from high school with bonnets sliding off the backs of their heads and long, tight, tie-back dresses—were eyeing him invitingly, but he gave Angel his complete attention. Is there any way more sure by which a boy of sixteen may win the adoration of an eleven-year-old girl?

"Here's Joe Joe," said Angel, piloting her charge vaingloriously down the aisle.

The two boys were friends at once. They started through the April noon talking as though to win a wager. Angel listened contentedly as she skipped along between them, looking up first at one and then at the other.

"Is that a fact? Does your family really sing in opera?"

"All of my aunts and uncles do. Don't they, Angel? Angel's mother was prima donna of the troupe."

"I have her trunk," said Angel proudly.

"What do they call themselves?" asked Alex excitedly. "I heard an opera once—we did, that is, before mother was married. It was the Caroline Richings Troupe and the opera was 'The Bohemian Girl.' "

"Ours is the Angelo Family English Opera Troupe. But they do 'The Bohemian Girl,' too."

"And 'Fra Diavolo.' "

"And 'The Crown Diamonds.' "

"Joe Joe can play some of the songs," said Angel, and hopped along backwards to look up into their faces as they walked.

"Just by ear," said Joe Joe modestly. "I've heard them rehearsing so much. I could sing them, too, before my voice went wobbly. Angel can sing them, though."

"Christmas!" said Alex, his eyes dancing. "I'd like to hear the music from 'The Bohemian Girl' again. Let's try some this afternoon."

"If Angel's . . . if Angel's father . . ." Joe Joe paused, embarrassed, but Alex seemed to take it as

a matter of course that fathers must be out of the way.

"If we get by ourselves, that is," he cut in. "Christmas! I'd certainly like it."

And they went up Willow Street humming, "Then You'll Remember Me."

XIV

THE John house at the corner of Willow and First streets was eight years old, but still the finest in Cloudman. A ponderous pile of red brick, with trimmings and turrets of limestone, it gained in impressiveness by its high iron fence and half block of tree-dotted lawn. David John had not lived for long in the cottage of a dazzling joyous yellow. That had been rented out, passed from tenant to tenant, and, on the first provocation, repainted. He had done well at the law; even better, during boom days, at real estate.

Angel led the two boys down the high dark hall with its colored-glass window and curving bannister.

"My new piano's in here," she said, opening the sliding doors of the front parlor a crack.

It was a large square piano, closed and locked. The key, Angel explained, hung on a nail by the door.

"Let's look at it."

They squeezed in.

The John front parlor was an uninviting room of frosty curtains, stiffly looped, and scowling black furniture. It was a room of the dead. Only Angel's piano—and that so tightly locked—touched the

living creatures of the house. Grandfather and Grandmother John gazed mournfully from encircling walnut at a framed wreath of the light-brown hair of Aunt Sophronia John who had died of lung complaint at twenty. The whatnot was crowded with relics of departed Tinkcoms; the album held their staring photographs. On the marble-topped table, under glass, stood Fanny Angel's wax flowers. But they weren't very good wax flowers. And she didn't live in them, somehow, as she lived in that red-strapped trunk in the attic.

As Angel fumbled for the key, her father called:

"Angel! What are you doing?"

Angel herded her charges down the hall.

"I was showing Alex my new piano, Father."

"Oh . . . that was a good idea. Have you shown him your pony?"

He always tried, Angel realized, to give her piano the same status as his other gifts. Yet he knew, he must know, what it meant to her. He must remember that when he presented it, this Christmas past, saying that a young lady should know how to play a waltz or two, she had had no words to thank him, only tears. She was not permitted to use it, except at practice time, but more than once he had found her in the front parlor with her treasure—polishing its legs, wiping off its keys, petting it.

Angel made no answer, now, and Mr. Wickersham said loudly:

"A boy, my dear, is naturally more interested in ponies."

The back parlor where the company was gathered was distinctly a room of the living. Here the three dwellers in the house had written their names. Mrs. Tinkcom's name was in the tidies and geraniums and the flames leaping behind the isinglass windows of the hard-coal heater. It was a balmy day, but Mrs. Tinkcom "liked a room warm." David John's name was in the student lamp and littered reading table, in the carefully preserved back numbers of the New York *Tribune* and *Harper's*. Angel's name was written high and low, in color. Those cheerful chromos "Paddy in Difficulty" and "Carlo in Mischief" upon the wall; that bouquet of red paper roses upon her father's table; the scraps of violet silk behind the stove—everything that Angel loved was colorful, except her piano, and she would have covered that with gilt.

Mrs. Tinkcom called them to dinner. With hot biscuits, plum preserves and a pot of good coffee, the meal intended for four stretched easily to seven. The children, perforce, ate silently, though not without the exchange of cabalistic signs and smiles. Their elders discussed the hoppers and the day of prayer.

A satanic city newspaper had jeered at the day of prayer. Another had claimed that it advertised Minnesota unfavorably. Eastern journals had,

indeed, commented on the proclamation, describing in detail the distress which had occasioned it.

"But they didn't scare *me* out," said Mr. Wickersham humorously. He had, it seemed, come with money to loan.

"No state needs to be ashamed of saying its prayers," said Angel's father. "Minnesota doesn't need to be ashamed. The Lord himself knows why he put this curse upon us, but when he lifts it we'll have a land of beauty here."

"I like the valley very much," said Mrs. Wickersham timidly. "It makes me think of Ohio."

Angel, looking up at the lady as she spoke, was surprised to see how pretty she was. Angel was used to the flamboyant prettiness of her cousins and aunts, which leaped out at one so audaciously that it was impossible to miss it. Here was a different sort, which one discovered by chance as one discovers a violet in the grass. The lady was pale—she had mentioned a headache—but her skin was like mother-of-pearl. Her brown hair drooped over her ears; her shoulders drooped, too, in their folded surplice; and her brown eyes looked out timorously as a bird's from its nest. She had a way, when her husband spoke to her, of fluttering her lashes with a suggestion of panic. Why, wondered Angel, had she married such a horrid man?

The company returned to the back parlor. The conversation went on and on into Minnesota's future,

and Alex, Angel, and Joe Joe, exchanging glances of mock despair, brought out the stereoscope. They were looking at Swiss scenes with languid interest when David John said:

"But why not take a drive? It would give me real pleasure to show you some of our beauty spots. The children will be all right with Mrs. Tinkcom. Won't you, Angel?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Angel, fearful of seeming too eager, fearful also of laughing at the way the two boys' heads had popped up at his words.

Mrs. Wickersham hesitantly mentioned her headache. Would they excuse her and leave her at her home? She would not for a moment deprive Mr. Wickersham . . .

But there was to be no question of her depriving Mr. Wickersham. He knew these women's headaches. The fresh air would do it good. Mrs. Wickersham, her lashes fluttering, agreed that perhaps he was right, and David John ordered the carriage.

The children regarded the Lake of Lucerne with enthusiasm.

"Would you like to take out the pony-cart?" her father asked Angel. He put his hand on her head in one of his infrequent caresses, and for a moment he imperiled the plot. She did love her father, she *did*. As always his touch made her want to spring to his arms. But how unjust of him to forbid her the use

of her piano! And how gay to be in a secret with Alex whose bright reckless head was poised now for her answer.

"No, thank you, Father. We're having such a good time."

The children watched from the window until the roans were far down Willow Street. Then they turned to each other with snapping eyes. Angel was silently delegated to manage Mrs. Tinkcom.

"Auntie Tinkcom!" Her tone was plaintive. The good woman, she knew, thought her father overseverc. "Auntie Tinkcom, could Joe Joe play just a little on my piano?"

"Your father . . ." began Mrs. Tinkcom.

"He never said Joe Joe mightn't play."

"Well, lock it up when you're through."

With "Gold Elsie" and her spectacles, Mrs. Tinkcom settled herself in her armchair. It stood in her favorite warm nook by the stove. She would, Angel signaled, be asleep in no time.

The three children ran down the hall and into the front parlor. Up went the shades, each to a different height.

"What do you want first?" asked Joe Joe. He threw off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and ran his slim fingers through his heavy black hair.

"The gypsy chorus. I'm Devil's-hoof," said Alex. The snowflakes in his eyes were dancing now. "Say, Angel . . . you haven't a sash I could borrow?"

"Yes, I have," said Angel. She raced up the stairs, raced down again with her Roman sash which Alex knotted jauntily about his hips.

His voice, like Joe Joe's, was wobbly, but the texture was rich black velvet. He aspired to be a basso profundo, and Angel's voice was as high and nimble as a canary's, but between them they managed everything—"The Heart Bow'd Down," "The Fair Land of Poland," "A Soldier's Life," "Then You'll Remember Me"; they went down the list with blissful unawareness of their individual capacities.

"Let Angel do 'I Dreamt that I Dwelt' " commanded Director Joe Joe. "She does it nicely. Aunt Jenny Lind taught her."

"Just a . . . just a moment," said Angel. "I'll be back in a moment."

She sped up the stairs.

Whether it was the sash which Alex wore so dashingly, whether it was the music which tingled down her spine, whether it was another Arline investing her flying feet—who can say?

At the top she paused, panting, her hands at her little flat breast.

Dared she? Dared she? The key was in the lock. She had found it there on one of her periodic visits to the trunk. Her father, she fancied, had left it.

She could wear them and put them back before he returned. He was driving out to her Uncle Joseph's. She had heard him say so. Laggingly now, her heart

knocking like a giant hand on a door, she climbed the second flight.

The attic was very cold and strangely dark. The sunshine, she felt, had fled just as she entered. Surely when she first rose above the stairs, there had been a patch of pale gold light upon the floor? She tiptoed toward the trunk, turned the key which stuck and grated in the lock, flung up the lid. Something in her throat, something big and prickly which she could not swallow, made her sick . . . a little.

Then, fear gone in an excitement which caused her cheeks to flame and her eyes to swim, she sank her small brown hands into the box. Never a Captain Kidd, never a bold Lafitte, ran treasure through his fingers with more joy. Velvets, there were, and silks and muslins with gold paper pasted on them in strips. Shawls, there were, and scarves and tights and flaunting red handkerchiefs. Jewelry, there was, a great box of it—brassy chains, earrings, paste rubies and pearls. Wigs, there were, and artificial flowers and a pair of high laced boots.

Handful after handful Angel threw upon the floor. She swayed above them like a slender drunken nymph.

"Angel! Angel!" Alex and Joe Joe were shouting from below.

She buried her nose in the pile of garments, inhaled their lovely smell. There was a smell of leather,

a smell of grease-paint, a smell of dead perfume. Tears began to fall into the gay clutched armful.

"Angel! What's the matter?"

"I'll be right down."

She caught at a scarlet cloth rose. This she twisted in her heavy hair. She scrambled into a red velvet dress. It was much too long and she tucked it up above her tiny boots. She put on chains, as many as there were. She took up a fan of long green peacock feathers. No need for paint; her cheeks were redder than the fever. Clutching her skirts, she fumbled down the stairs.

How dark it had grown!

On the lower flight, she began singing. She had never seen rehearsals of the opera, but this seemed a dramatic thing to do. Joe Joe, if he had any sense, would come in with the accompaniment. But there was dead silence below. Also the darkness deepened. It seemed not at all like mid-afternoon. That thought swam aimlessly in her dazzled consciousness.

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,
With vassals and serfs at my side,
And of all who assembled within those walls,
That I was the hope and the pride."

Step by step, she descended, her eyes lowered dreamily, her fan opened across her breast.

"I had riches too great to count, could boast
Of a high ancestral name,"

Step by step—she was almost to the curve.

"But I also dreamt which pleased me most,
That you loved me still . . ."

She stopped.

Standing in the hall, his overcoat over his arm, his hat in his hand, his dark-blue eyes upon her, was her father.

The long moment of tension was broken by a pistol shot of thunder. Joe Joe, who had been staring at Angel as if entranced, Alex, who had been leaning in the doorway, his eyes undeniably dancing, both ran to the window. Lightning brightened the room for a moment. Thunder came again. And this was followed by a beating of rain on the house, a streaming of rain down the panes.

"Father!" cried Angel. His face . . . why, his face looked as it had looked that night when he told her of her mother's death. She remembered how she had pounded the little trunk. And now she, as well, was to blame.

She started down the stairs, stumbling over her long skirts, lifting up her arms.

"Father, I was just play-acting. I'll clean up the parlor . . ." But she knew, her instinct told her, that it wasn't the parlor that mattered.

He did not take her up. He did not speak.

Alex and Joe Joe came running back.

"A thunder storm in April, sir."

"Yes," answered David John in a matter-of-fact voice. "Didn't you notice how dark it was getting? That was why we cut our ride short."

Joe Joe stood listening.

"It's God, I think," he said in a hushed, awed tone, "sending away those hoppers."

Joe Joe's tone in its surrender to the mystery of the moment, the menacing noises of the wind and rain, her father's cold ignoring of her upstretched arms, these worked together. Suddenly, desperately and loudly, Angel screamed.

Her father caught her up, then.

"You boys go and find Mrs. Tinkcom. Tell her to make us some supper."

He gathered Angel into his arms, sat down on the stairs.

"It was God speaking to *me!*" cried Angel hysterically, "because I opened that trunk."

"Why, Angel!" Her father's voice was gentle. "I asked for that trunk just for your sake. I have never forbidden you to open it."

"No, but I knew," she sobbed, flinging herself against him. "I knew you didn't want it. You're like Uncle Joseph about Joe Joe. You don't want me to be an opera singer."

He held her tighter, pressing his face against her dress. Perhaps he, too, smelled those distant lovely

odors. After a moment he answered in a voice of choked tenderness:

"I'll never ask you not to be an opera singer, Angel. But I just hope. . . . In the fall I'm going to send you to the seminary."

The seminary! Here were words to dry a child's tears. The adventure of going to the seminary! Maybe after the seminary, she wouldn't want to be an opera singer. Maybe she'd rather marry Alex and have a lot of children. She began to feel ashamed of her scream.

"I'd love that, father."

The rain came more and more heavily, but it sounded cozy now. How strange it was, and how pleasant, to lie still and close like this, while, in the back parlor, Alex and Joe Joe lit the lamps and Mrs. Tinkcom set out dishes.

"Father," asked Angel, "do you think that rain is God sending away the hoppers?"

"I hope it is, Angel."

"I prayed," she said, sighing, "I prayed just dreadfully hard."

"I'm glad of that," he answered, still not moving.

XV

WHETHER or not that rain was God sending away the hoppers was a much-debated question over the next few years.

In speaking to strangers, many Minnesotans averred that the locusts vanished with the storm. The Angels, indeed, gave dramatic, though unfortunately varying accounts of the actual flight. They went, said Benjy Angel, who had been in Nashville when it happened, in a lurid cloud shaped like a cross. Much goose-flesh was raised in the course of time by his description.

The truth of the matter was, perhaps, that the hoppers hatched out as frisky as ever, with the impious Minneapolis *Tribune* saying "We told you so." Through May the farmers were at them with fire and tar; and discouragement brooded over the tender fields. But a small red insect with an appetite for hopper eggs appeared. And the hoppers themselves were early on the move. During the first week of July, dark clouds of them departed every day. The crop —a splendid one—was saved, for Russia, Turkey and the world. Who shall say but that the hand of God was in it?

The locusts left behind, as David John had promised, a land of beauty. Down the wooded

valleys and out into the rolling prairies moved appreciative Germans and Swedes and Norwegians and Danes and Welshmen and Scots. Rich farms and friendly little towns were bound together by railways. Schools and churches arose at the crossroads. The seminary, which long had occupied the bluff above the river at Cloudman, added a wing and put in a furnace and drew pupils from all over the state.

It was a gray brick building with tall arched windows and flights of yellow painted stairs. It could not vie in picturesqueness with the brewery which shared its eminence, and which, erected by some Germans of the community, resembled an old Rhenish castle. Together they looked down upon Cloudman in the valley; and down upon Cloudman looked Angel also. The cities of the world, pointed out by the evil one, would have tempted her gaze less.

On her way to prayers, to meals, to classes, to dormitory, she seldom passed a western window that she did not lag to look—from Monday to Friday, from September to June, during those long years. The bare hill of spring, the painted hill of autumn, the purple-shadowed snowy hill of winter, invited her feet to their downward slope. She could see the limestone towers of home among the roofs below.

She was very homesick. And homesickness is a malady not considered enough in the distinguished clinics.

"They think I'm queer, up here," she sniffled to Sadie, whose mid-week visits sponged up her despair. "I'm different from them. They don't like me."

"You're too smart, that's all," consoled Sadie.

Angel had, indeed, long since outstripped her class. She had found solace in furious study for a time—until it brought too much despised approbation.

"Besides," Sadie went on, "they must like you. They give you the best pieces to speak at the exhibitions. They give you all the solo parts to sing."

"That's just because I do them so well. They don't like me really. Any of them."

She was not entirely in the wrong. She had, in this group of substantial rural daughters, one or two ardent followers, but few friends. They gave her a startled admiration, yes. She was so gay when she was gay; so morose when she was morose; so pretty always, with her black hair flying behind her. But they chummed with each other and left her as alone as a bright-feathered fowl is sometimes left in a barnyard.

"What would I *do,* Sadie, if it wasn't for you?"

"You mean a lot to me, too," answered Sadie somberly. "Who would I talk to about Emil if I couldn't come here?"

For Sadie and Angel were in love; and discussion of their adored ones formed a not inconsiderable part of their weekly colloquy.

Sadie's Emil was leader of the band. Her early weakness for the cornet had perhaps forecast this capitulation to gold braid and brass buttons. And then he had such up-sweeping yellow mustaches! He was middle-aged, verging on stoutness, one of the many respectable Germans living in East Cloudman, and a devoted pater familias. He was aware of Sadie's existence only as one of the little black Angels. But Sadie quaked with joy if she passed him on the street. She wore night and day a purloined brass button on a string. This idea she had from Angel who preserved in a pill box a snip from the end of her crisp black hair which Alex had so often pulled.

"I'm *hardest* in love, Sadie," Angel always insisted. "You have your music, and I have *nothing* but Alex."

This was truer than either she or Sadie realized. Her father had not asked her to give up the thought of opera, but in a feverish midnight session with herself she had voluntarily relinquished it, and floods of golden imaginings had been turned thereby into another channel—into a troublous channel, as it proved.

For Alex was now well along in high school. He and Joe Joe, enthusiastic friends, were also beaux gallants among the high-school girls. Sadie was forever bringing news of a new and violent attachment.

"Nobody knows how I hate big girls . . . nobody *knows!*" Angel would cry, her eyes flashing. "I don't see," she questioned passionately, "why God didn't let me be born just a few years sooner."

"Maybe Alex wouldn't of liked you?" suggested her Job's comforter.

"He'd of liked me," said Angel. Her small bosom rose and fell. It was inexplicable but absolute, that conviction that he would have liked her.

Nothing, however, could bridge the gulf which separated them as big boy and little girl. He was insultingly fond of her. His brotherly teasing was wormwood and bitters. His affectionate indifference was gall.

It hadn't been so bad when she was really a little girl. But now, she was in her teens. If she had been in public school with her hair up and her dresses down, she might have been going to dances. Sadie was.

And here she was penned up on the hill, wearing a silly uniform and looking like a child, while Alex was a senior and might next year be gone—goodness knew where.

"He hates old Mr. Wickersham," Sadie explained. "And old Mr. Wickersham hates him. He thinks Alex ought to come into the bank, and Alex would rather be shot. You know how Alex loves music? And before his mother married Mr. Wickersham he promised Alex piano lessons and all kinds of things.

And now he almost explodes because Alex sings in the glee club. But Alex does it, you bet."

Ah, yes, Alex did it! Painful memory recalled that glossy red head bent so daringly close to Vina Scattergood's on the crowded platform of the high-school hall.

"Why doesn't his mother do something?" she asked, returning to Alex's troubles from her own.

"Oh, Alex is so tender of her. That's why he's going to clear out next year, so he won't always be causing her trouble."

Yes, plainly, next year he would be gone. It was her foreknowledge of this which had brought up the matter of the autograph album.

Angel had given Sadie her album with instructions that when Alex came to the farm she was to present it for his signature.

"But don't tell him I asked you to," Angel had warned. She had a nightmarish fear that Alex and Joe Joe might suspect her lovelorn state.

"Ask Joe Joe to write in it, and then say carelessly, 'Why don't you write something too, Alex? Angel won't mind.' "

Sadie had agreed to execute the commission, and it seemed that week as if Wednesday would never come. Monday was a month of Mondays; Tuesday was a month of Tuesdays; and Wednesday dragged interminably through prayer and study and recita-

tion periods to that late afternoon hour when "recreation and female visitors" were permitted.

Angel's school home was but a cot in the dormitory. She and Sadie could not talk in comfort there. So she had asked permission to sketch on Wednesday afternoons in the little lookout which topped the building. It was open and very cold, but it gave the desired privacy, and Angel scrambled up the stairs to-day, well wrapped for a lengthy conference.

It was late winter, the bleakest season of the year in Minnesota. Gray sky, gray snow—could even the hardiest wind-flower be waiting beneath that frozen crust? Winter snow, reflected Angel, gets worn and dingy as winter bonnets. Where, oh, where, *was* Sadie's bonnet? Where was Sadie's agile figure on the hill?

Sadie appeared at last, on the hill and on the stairs.

"Do stop panting, darling, and talk!" cried Angel, pulling her into the lookout.

Sadie panted on but said no word.

"Even if you *can't* talk, you can show me the album. It must be nice, for your eyes are shining so."

Sadie's eyes were, in fact, shining more than usual. And they always shone like shoe-buttons, for she had, more than any of the others, the look of her Grandmother Angel. Her hair within the en-

circling nubia was coarse and black. Her glowing skin had undertints of gold. The curve of her cheek was still childlike, but her breast was full and her skirts, to Angel's envy, touched the floor.

"Hurry! What did he write?"

"Oh, Angel! . . . something . . . to tell you."

"He hasn't"—Angel swallowed—"gone away?"

"No, no. It's me. I'm going."

"You're going? Oh, Sadie! Where?"

"To Uncle Benjy. To sing in 'Pinafore!' "

Angel took Sadie's mittened hands. She did not ask more questions or speak at all. Her jewel-like blue eyes, fixed so intently on her cousin's face, spoke for her.

"You know," gasped Sadie, "I'm fifteen. And I didn't pass into high school at Christmas. Pa was ever so ashamed. And just to-day Pa got a letter . . ."

She paused to muster breath.

"You know how Uncle Benjy and the others are. They almost never write. This was the first letter we have had since summer. Pa was pleased as anything to get it. And they didn't ask for money, not for anything."

"*Didn't* they?" breathed Angel.

"They're making mints of money, Uncle Benjy says. People are crazy about this 'Pinafore.' "

She sat down and loosened her nubia. Angel still stood rigid. "Pinafore" . . . "Pinafore"—the very

name had magic. "Pinafore" . . . "Pinafore"—it skipped and danced about the room.

"You know everybody's singing and whistling it. Audiences, Uncle Benjy says, want to sing it with them. Uncle Benjy wishes he could split his troupe in two. He could book two troupes, he says. If he makes money enough, do you know what he wants to do? Fix up the old hotel and give different operas there. Give 'Pinafore' on a raft put out into Blue Lake. That's just talk, of course."

She gulped blissfully before proceeding.

"He wrote pages and pages, and he asked Pa to send me. He knew, he said, that Pa wouldn't send Joe Joe. But he said they could use an alto in the chorus, and it was a chance for me to get experience."

"But, Sadie! Poor Joe Joe! How does Joe Joe feel?"

"He feels terrible." Sadie's eyes, like Angel's, filled with tears. "*He* failed at Christmas, too, you know. We're none of us good at school except you. Why on earth Pa wants to make a doctor of him . . ."

Gray sky, gray snow blurred together to Angel's vision. First tears had been for Joe Joe, but these tears—welling up from bitterness—these were for herself. She sang better than Sadie, better than any of them. She didn't just think so herself, everybody thought so.

"I wish . . . I wish I could go," she said in a small voice.

"Why don't you have hysterics?" suggested Sadie. Since the day of prayer, when her scream had worked such wonders, Angel had given vent to more than one dramatic outburst.

She shook her head, however.

"No," she said. "I've stopped having hysterics. I'm never going to have them any more."

"Why? They almost always get you what you want."

"I don't care. I don't like myself afterwards. But, Sadie, what about Emil?"

Sadie was, for a moment, at a loss.

"What about Emil?" she sparred.

"How do you feel about leaving him?"

"Why . . . I guess it's just as well. I don't suppose, really, it was quite right to feel as I did . . . as I do . . . about a married man."

Angel saw through that transparency.

"Well," she said with a sigh, "I have nothing but love. So show me the album."

From the pocket of her coat, Sadie produced the plush-covered, gold-clasped volume.

"I did just as you told me to," she said. "I asked Joe Joe first. And he thought a long while, and he got the red ink and a new pen and practiced on a piece of paper. He loves you a lot, Joe Joe does."

She opened the book to a page distinguished by its lacy calligraphy.

"Think of me when you are happy,
Keep for me one little spot;
In the depth of thine affection
Plant a sweet forget-me-not."

"Darling Joe Joe!" cried Angel. "Then what did you say next?"

"Then," continued Sadie, "I turned to Alex. They were practicing duets, but mostly talking about their girls. They talk very silly about their girls . . . Ooh! Excuse me, Angel! I said, 'Why don't *you* write in it too, Alex? Angel wouldn't mind.' And he dashed this right off."

"Is it something nice?" shivered Angel. "You know what he wrote in Vina Scattergood's:

" 'Sweet is the girl who reads this line,
I wish her sweetness all were mine.'

Tell me, Sadie, before I look. Did he write something nice?"

"We-ell," hedged Sadie.

She leafed a page or two and Angel leaned forward. Smiles danced expectantly over her little dark face. But when she read what Alex had written, she shot to her feet. She seized the book, tore it in two and hurled it far out into the west as though the flaming sunset were a bonfire in which she would burn it. She opened her mouth to scream but closed it suddenly.

"No," she uttered with blazing eyes, "I said I wouldn't, and I won't. Good-bye, Sadie."

"Angel," whimpered Sadie, "you're not mad at *me?*"

"I'm mad," said Angel, "at God and the president and the world and every one in it." And she stamped down the stairs declaiming mockingly:

> "Remember me when far far off,
> Where the woodchucks die of whooping cough."

XVI

H. M. S. Pinafore, manned by the Angelo Family English Opera Troupe, sailed into Cloudman with all flags flying early the following fall.

Posters in three colors heralded its arrival. From one end of River Street to the other, the hoardings were bright with promise. They flashed out at David John, driving to and from his office. They flashed out at Alex Webb, reluctantly adding columns in Aaron Wickersham's bank. They flashed out at Joseph Angel and all his eager brood. They did not flash out at Angel, for her father, getting wind of the proposed invasion, had hurried her, all unsuspecting, on a visit to Vermont.

Cloudman boiled with excitement. This was the first time that the black Angels had returned professionally since they drove away behind Bob and Jerry so many years ago. And young Sadie Angel was with them. And it was well known that they were minting money, as were all troupes that could sing or croak the merry melodies of "Pinafore."

For "Pinafore" was raging like a fever, from north to south, from east to west. It was more than a fever; it was a frenzy. The country was "Pinafore" mad. Not since Barnum brought over Jenny Lind had America rocked to a musical disturbance com-

parable to this one, caused by Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. and "his sisters and his cousins and his aunts."

The operetta had not yet been sung in Cloudman, but fortunate travelers to the twin cities had brought back its tinkling tunes, and the Minnesota valley was preparing to give it a welcome worthy of the Queen's navee.

"I'm going to sit downstairs," declared Alex Webb to the group of boys which gathered on summer evenings in the park.

"Going to take a girl?"

"No," answered Alex quickly, "I wouldn't be bothered with a girl."

This was greeted with laughter, although he meant it seriously, which is one of the penalties of being serious seldom.

And Alex was serious very seldom. He was as full of jokes as he was of songs; always, said Aaron Wickersham, playing the fool. He was not serious about the bank. He arrived at it late, stole away from it early and learned as little of its workings as he was able to. He was not serious about girls, although he liked them only less than they liked him, and others than Angel approved the challenging pose of his red head, his dancing blue eyes, his teasing smile, and his tall figure which gracefully outwitted the purpose of clothes that were chosen to give service alone.

There was one thing, however, which he took seriously. Music occupied a dais in his thoughts. He didn't know why. It did, that was all. And he wasn't going to be bothered by talking to a girl through "Pinafore."

"Pinafore," of course, was only an operetta. It mightn't be much in the way of music. But it would be music, just the same—music and acting and a glimpse at that bright mimic world which looked so enticing from Aaron Wickersham's puritanical household.

Alex was bitterly unhappy in that household. His nature and Aaron Wickersham's were like two hostile armies encamped in the same ground, breaking out in spite of themselves, now here, now there, in endless feuds and irritations. He was struggling on at home and in the bank for the sake of his mother. Whenever they had a chance to talk alone, she wept and asked him not to go away. But he wondered sometimes whether she might not live easier relieved of the added vexations which he brought.

"Take this 'Pinafore' thing," he said to Joe Joe. "As sure as the world, there'll be a fracas about that." For the theater was forbidden the Wickersham family, along with novels and secular songs, and dances both round and square.

"Lots of the church members are going," encouraged Joe Joe. "They say that 'Pinafore' is

different. There isn't a woman dressed in men's clothes from start to finish."

"He'd find something devilish in it," said Alex gloomily. "Remember when I went to see Alice Oates in 'Giroflé Giroflá?' "

Joe Joe remembered.

Nevertheless Alex bought his ticket. The seat sale opened the last week in August, and the mere fact of his having the necessary funds at that point in the month showed the urgency of his desire. His salary was meager—it was only after a battle that he had acquired a salary at all—and, such as it was, it slipped like water through his spendthrift fingers.

The ticket was concealed in an inside pocket. There were many surreptitious pattings of that pocket. And whenever he found himself alone, he whipped out the magic green oblong. He wished longingly that he dared show it to his mother. He had wished, indeed, to buy her one. How she had loved that unforgotten performance of "The Bohemian Girl." How they had hummed the melodies together and recalled to each other this and that about it! But of course her going was out of the question, and his own must be carefully managed.

He had worked out a system for such excursions—a good system, too. Three years of attendance at proscribed high-school dances had developed it. He simply took his Sunday clothes to the carriage-house, retired to his room after prayers, slid down the wood-

shed roof, made his toilet under difficulties and proceeded to call for his lady. The explosion came—if it came at all—after the fun was over. If he returned to find an ominous light in the front chamber, he boldly rang the doorbell, for the secret of the woodshed roof must be preserved. But who minds paying the piper when he is young and dances divinely? Certainly not Alex.

On the day that the Angels brought "Pinafore" to Cloudman, Alex was up and dressed early. His Sunday suit was smuggled out before breakfast with a high celluloid collar and a green bow-tie which was his particular pride. The handbills requested "full dress on the part of the citizens," but that was interpreted broadly. Alex visualized himself with considerable satisfaction sitting well down front in the Sunday suit.

He had hard work to erase his happy look for breakfast, but it was essential for him to seem gloomy to-day. Purely as a matter of form, he had asked permission to go to "Pinafore" and had been refused. It would be suspicious indeed if he did not show resentment.

He flung into the dining room, black as a thunder cloud. He scowled through prayers. If Mr. Wickersham sensed that one of them was unusually hungry, that there was difficulty in keeping breakfast hot or that Alex was in a bad mood, he always extended himself in his petition; and so he did this morning.

He prayed for the erring black Angels, for those misguided brothers and sisters who were going to "Pinafore," for that member of his own household who had cherished the sinful wish to go. Dina, the pretty hired girl, turned her head sharply at that, and then sniffed as though she smelled the mush burning. Alex sniggered, but metamorphosed the snigger into a snort of rage. His mother threw him a tender, troubled look as they seated themselves at the table.

Still heavy of brow and light of heart, he accompanied his stepfather to the bank. His duties there prevented him from watching the train come in or from hanging around the charmed environs of the Union House. News of what was transpiring filtered in, however.

"The house is all sold out. Standing room only."

"They're rehearsing now—with the Cloudman orchestra."

"You should see Sadie Angel in a barrel dress!"

Toward noon Joe Joe came in. His face was pale with radiance although as usual he was gentle and temperate of speech.

"Uncle Benjy needs a supe or two. Pa is letting me go on. Just for to-night, of course."

"Christmas, what a lark! I wish I could do it."

"I wish you could. I thought of you first thing. I don't suppose there's a chance?"

"Not a chance! The old man would blow up and bust. How's Sadie? Is she putting on airs?"

"*Is* she?" smiled Joe Joe.

It was increasingly exciting. Even the air of the Wickersham bank was electric. Alex was in terror lest his face betray his ecstasy. On the walks with his stepfather from and to the bank and during the noon dinner, he kept his chin tucked sulkily into his collar.

He caught again that tender, troubled look on his mother's face.

"I wish I could tell her I am going," he thought uncomfortably. There she was, grieving her sweet heart out for his sake! And here he was with a magic green ticket in his pocket! But it was his practice to keep her from advance knowledge of his crimes. Otherwise she might be convicted as accomplice.

On the way back to the bank, Mr. Wickersham offered:

"I trust that these playmates of the devil will make money enough to get out of town to-night."

"I think they will, sir. The house is sold out," said Alex coldly.

He walked stiffly along, but his impulse was to caper. His spirits rose higher and higher as the afternoon wore on. Released from the bank at last, he shot straight to the theater. It did not lack allure because it was closed and silent. The broad doors, which to-night would be thrown open to admit the crowd; the red and yellow bills posted outside; Toddy Blue, the stage hand, loitering in the alley;

all had a new mysterious look, as though they were illumined by a colored light.

He was late for supper. He hurried in a blissful trance through the smoky September twilight whistling:

> "Things are seldom what they seem,
> Skim milk masquerades as cream."

The wooden sidewalk was covered with fallen yellow leaves. He shuffled through them briskly in time to his own music. On the steps of home he bethought himself of pulling a sober face.

Meals were always dreary in the Wickersham household. All too often Mr. Wickersham made them occasions for lectures to his wife on her extravagance with eggs in cooking or to Alex on the thickness with which he spread butter on his bread. Tonight was no exception, but Alex was too happy to care. He was even too happy to listen and he concentrated on maintaining his bitter look. It was with calamitous suddenness that he heard his mother's voice addressing Mr. Wickersham, a very frightened voice, so frightened that it sounded faint and dry. She had to pause at intervals to swallow.

"Aaron . . . I hear that this 'Pinafore' is not improper . . . very wholesome, really. I wish . . . Alex is so fond of music. I wish . . . that Alex might go."

There was silence. Alex raised a face of conster-

nation to look around the table. His mother's eyes were fixed on her husband's visage, the lashes winking rapidly, while her fingers pleated the edge of the tablecloth. Her husband was returning her stare, his eyes bulging, his clamped jaws turning purple. Dina stood transfixed with horror in the doorway.

"Well, he'll not go! By heaven!" the outburst came at last, with a downward smash of his fist that rattled the dishes. "What sort of a mother is this? No wonder she has a worthless rascal for a son! She'd send him into the devil's playhouse. Do you hear that, Dina? She'd send him into the very jaws of hell. How can I . . ."

"Mr. Wickersham!" Alex had leaped to his feet.

"You go to your room!" shouted Mr. Wickersham, rising also, and with another terrifying downward smash of his fist. "Go to your room! Do you hear me? This is my house, and I'll be obeyed. Go to your room!"

"My mother . . ." Alex started again.

"Go! Go! Oh, Alex, please go!" His mother, weeping, pled with him from across the table.

"Of course he'll go! And he'll not return downstairs this evening."

Fearless as always and furiously angry, Alex was decided by his mother's pitiful imploring gesture. He turned and marched out of the dining room. He marched up the stairs and into his own chamber, banging and locking the door. Too heated to pause,

he proceeded at once to the window. He flung up the sash, removed the screen, climbed out into the cool consoling evening. In a trice he was down and into the carriage-house, savagely stripping off his garments.

He dressed in an angry daze which rendered him incapable of thought. Mechanically he rubbed off his best shoes, perked out the green bow-tie. But when he was ready it came to him that all pleasure in the evening was gone. If only his mother knew that he was going! A weight, heavy as lead, lay in his chest. He found that he could hardly breathe above it. He wished he were a little boy and could cry with his head in his mother's skirts.

Leaving the carriage-house, he crept to the kitchen and looked in. Dina was washing the dishes and his mother, the traces of her tears erased, was helping her to dry them. Alex watched her slight figure moving between cupboard and sink. On an impulse he knocked lightly at the pane.

Dina and his mother looked toward the window.

"It's Alex," he whispered, tapping again.

Dina crossed to the window and opened it. Alex thrust his magic green ticket into her hand.

"Give mother a peek at that," he said with suddenly renewed elation.

Dina held out the ticket. His mother gave a little happy cry. She clasped her hands girlishly, looking

from the ticket to her boy's cocked head in the window.

At that moment, bellowing something as he came about her helping Dina whom he paid a dollar a week, Mr. Wickersham opened the dining-room door.

It was not a split second before he had the ticket in his hand. Almost at once he made as if to tear it.

"Sir!" said Alex hoarsely. For a moment he was still too proud to ask for mitigation. Then he had a sudden vision of the citizens of Cloudman filing into those lighted wide-flung doors. "Sir!" he said, "there isn't a seat left . . ."

He choked, but his strained young gaze spoke for him.

Mr. Wickersham tore the green card, slowly but thoroughly into bits.

"I'll have to have that bedroom window looked at. Come on in here!" he said.

"You go to hell!" cried Alex. Tears blurred his eyes. Turning, he ran away into the darkness.

XVII

THE entrance to the opera house was refulgent with kerosene lamps and jammed to the sidewalk with eager Cloudmanites when Alex arrived.

He had had some faint hope that he might be admitted ticketless. He was slightly acquainted with Freddy Dukes, the red-faced local manager. But this hope faded when he saw the rabble at the doors, saw Freddy Dukes, redder-faced than ever, his starched white evening tie askew, jumping about like a corn in a popper in his efforts to handle the crowd.

Alex paused, breathing hard, debating his next move. He remembered what Joe Joe had said about acting as supe and started at a run down the alley. Restraints on his own conduct were blown to the four winds now.

"It isn't too late! It isn't too late!" he prayed as he ran.

Even in Cloudman the stage door is guarded as the entrance to heaven may be. St. Peter McMannus was old and decrepit, but he could have held mad dogs at bay.

"I don't want to get in," pleaded Alex. "I just want to see young Joe Angel."

"Well, he's busy. Be off with ye now!" came through an inch crack of door.

"It's a matter of life and death!" shouted Alex.

"*Is* it now!"

Alex threw himself against the door. The strength of his desperation landed him well over the threshold.

"You clear out of here!" shouted old McMannus.

"Please!" cried Alex. "Please!"

The urgency in his voice reached a lady who sauntered toward them. She was garishly costumed, was old and ugly . . . or did those painted brown lines give that impression? Her voice, when she spoke, was mellow with a faint foreign flavor.

"What is it you want?" she asked.

"I want to see young Joe Angel."

"La! Is it really important?"

"It's important to me."

The lady regarded him, his fierce erectness, his ruffled red hair, his whitely blazing face. She put her hand on his arm and laughed softly.

"Boy!" she called to a passing lad. "Fetch young Joe Angel."

She sauntered on then, and Alex looked feverishly about him. Stage hands were running scenery into place; costumed figures were darting into view; and from somewhere came the impatient whine of a fiddle being put into tune.

"It isn't too late," prayed Alex, but with a sinking of the heart. That nervous fiddle said that it was very late indeed.

Joe Joe, dressed as a sailor, with disfiguring

blotches of red on cheeks and lips, hurried up presently.

"Alex! Whatever is it?"

"The old man found my ticket and tore it up. Joe, could you, could you . . . I came around to see. Could you get me in as supe now?"

"Gosh, Alex!" Joe Joe gazed at him appalled. "It's most time for the curtain." But the mute appeal in his friend's eyes was more than he could bear. "You wait here a moment. I'll find out."

He came back pulling by the sleeve—the fiddler. Benjy Angel was sleek of hair, of beard, of broadcloth, but his eyes held a wild confusion. Was the troupe not singing, and for the first time, in Cloudman?

"No, no! It's out of the question!" he shouted to Joe Joe as they came.

"But Uncle Benjy! He's my best friend!"

"What mightn't he do without a rehearsal?"

"He wouldn't need to sing, you know."

"Sing! I should think not. He'd be sure to throw every one off."

"He'd stick close to me. He'd do exactly as I did."

"I'm sure, sir," cut in Alex, "I'm sure I'd not make a mistake."

His voice was hoarse with anxiety, and the Angels are soft of heart; but the clatter of restless hands already came from the house. The issue hung in the

balance. A hair's weight would have swung it, when the lady sauntered up.

"His shoes squeak, Benjy," she murmured meaningly.

Benjy capitulated.

"There isn't a suit to fit him."

"Yes, there is, Uncle Benjy. A long thin one."

"Well . . . you make him up, Jinnie. And tell him as much as you can."

Benjy ducked away; he moved with remarkable speed, his peg leg abetted by a short stout cane, and Alex and Joe Joe bounded down the stairs.

"Squeaking shoes bring luck," Joe Joe explained as they went. "I'm glad you wore your Sunday ones."

There was, miraculously, a suit to fit. Its bright blue and white were becoming, too, though the mirror showed him nothing but his dancing eyes. Joe Joe rushed him into it, then rushed him to the mellow-voiced lady, who made him up deftly under a bracket lamp.

She talked as swiftly as she worked.

"The thing of most importance is to step back when any of the principals wish to cross in front of you. And don't pull too hard on the rigging or lean on the railings."

"No, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am."

The call boy herded them with a third supe up to the stage. The real chorus men looked on loftily

while the others were shown to their places. Alex was given a length of rope to haul. He was reminded in a whisper to stick to Joe Joe. Then music sounded; the curtain rose; and he found himself in a glare of light with voices proclaiming on all sides:

"We sail the ocean blue,
And our saucy ship's a beauty;
We're sober men and true,
And attentive to our duty . . ."

The lamps which edged the stage swam into a line. The faces out in front jigged up and down. The singing deafened him at first, but he continued mechanically to haul and loop his rope and gradually the haze of confusion passed. He saw Joe Joe smiling at him, saw Benjy Angel down in the orchestra pit directing with his bow, saw even some familiar faces above the blurred white shirt fronts. When the tempo of the music changed, he remembered to step backward and make way for his friend, the lady who entered with a basket.

"I'm called little Buttercup,
Dear little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why,
But still I'm called Buttercup,
Poor little Buttercup,
Sweet little Buttercup, I."

The group of sailors pressed about her, and Alex went forward with the others. He felt of a sudden

cool and composed and, in a new way, happy. Meeting her eyes, he smiled at her.

"Why, I belong here," he said to himself. He straightened his handsome length, turned his head with that proud assured gesture that the little girl, Angel, so much admired.

All was easy after that, except not singing. It was sorely difficult not to sing. Ralph Rackstraw caroled his confession of love; Captain Corcoran sonorously announced himself; Josephine warbled her woes and Sir Joseph Porter's arrival was heralded in harmony by his relatives. The chorus was on and off the stage with here and there a chance to lift its voice, but even this occasional privilege was denied to Alex. He chafed under the prohibition—happily, however. On both sides of the proscenium arch, all were happy that night.

For Cloudman took "Pinafore" to its heart, as the rest of the world had done. It rocked with its joy. It clattered and stamped and whistled and cheered. In particular was it delighted with Tommie Angel as Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., and with the refrain of his opening song:

> "And we are his sisters and his cousins and his aunts,
> His sisters and his cousins and his aunts."

Strangely enough, Tommie had never before seen the personal application of these lines. It took the uproarious laughter of Cloudman to force him to it.

Yet the joke was obvious. If his admiring bodyguard was not composed of sisters and cousins and aunts, it did at least comprise almost exclusively nieces and daughters and other relations.

During the intermission Alex saw Tommie and Benjy pacing back and forth with their heads together:

"What rhymes with 'far'?" demanded Benjy.

"'Are,'" said Alex promptly, using the simple expedient of trying first the first letter of the alphabet.

"Good," said Tommie.

"Bright lad," said Benjy, and vouchsafed over his shoulder. "You did fine. Kept in the picture all the time. You've got stage sense. It's not so common either."

Even discounted a shade because of the leader's expansive mood, this was a pleasant compliment. And the Buttercup lady, speaking in a mellow voice and giving him her hand, added another. While Sadie, a trifle patronizingly, as was natural from a trouper of her experience, told him that he had done very well for an amateur.

His small success encouraged him in developing the plan—the little formless plan which had sprung into being in that moment when he had found himself so much at home, so completely and calmly happy on the unfamiliar stage. As the second act ran its triumphant course, he built up and padded

out this plan. One obstacle to success presented itself, however.

He had been forbidden definitely to sing. And the troupe was leaving at eleven fifty-five; there would be, unavoidably, curtain calls and speeches. When pray, would Benjy test his voice?

Resolving to sing his loudest on the first familiar chorus, he edged his way to an end place on the stage. He fixed his eyes on Benjy, held himself staunchly in readiness. Nothing offered, however, until the final chorus when, in desperation, he opened wide his throat:

"For he loves little Buttercup,
Dear little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why;
But still he loves Buttercup,
Dear little Buttercup,
Sweet little Buttercup, aye."

Benjy's bow did not falter in recognition.

Fortunately for Alex, Tommie Angel sprang a surprise in this chorus, a surprise which caused it to be repeated over and over again. When the solo was flung to him, he stepped forward. The music slowed down, and Alex knew what that conference between the two brothers had meant.

"And though I travel far," [sang Tommie]
"Where only strangers are,
I long for the love and peace which Cloudman grants."

"And so," [sang Hebe] "do your sisters and your cousins
and your aunts,
Especially your cousins whom you reckon up by
dozens . . ."

The chorus took the hint.

"And so do your sisters and your cousins and your aunts,
Especially your cousins whom you reckon up by dozens
and your aunts!"

That vanquished Cloudman.

Most of the company was in street clothes and the trunks had been pitched out at the stage door, before Benjy escaped from the hubbub in front of the curtain. Alex and Joe Joe were dressed and back on the stage waiting.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" asked Alex.

"Yep!" said Joe Joe gruffly. His arms were folded tightly over his chest as though it ached.

"I wish you could do it too," said Alex.

Joe Joe glanced briefly at the family party which was hurrying a chattering Sadie out into the night. He said nothing, and in that moment Benjy Angel's cane sounded behind them.

"Mr. Angelo!" Alex stepped into the path of the beaming *chef d'orchestra*. "I want to go with the show."

"Yes, yes, my boy! Supes always do."

"I'm different. I'm serious."

"I wish you could hear him sing, Uncle Benjy," offered the loyal Joe Joe.

"Seems to me I did hear a lot of black bass in that last chorus," answered Benjy Angel, twinkling. "See you next time we come to Cloudman. Great hurry . . ."

As earlier in the evening, at a moment of poignant importance, a lady sauntered up. But this was a beautiful lady, auburn haired, red lipped, with the breast of a bird on her little modish bonnet. Yet, when she spoke, it was again that mellow voice. Alex looked at her in confusion.

"What's the trouble, Benjy?"

"Your good-luck boy wants to go with the show, Virginie."

"God bless us," she said. "Why don't you take him? You could certainly use a good bass."

He turned suddenly on Alex.

"Your family mind?"

"My father's dead, sir. I've a stepfather. My mother wouldn't mind."

"Take seven dollars a week and your railroad fare?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right," concluded Benjy. "See you at the Union Depot in ten minutes if you don't change your mind." He paused to throw an arm over Joe Joe's shoulder. "I wish it was you, Joe Joe boy."

It was decided. It was done. Alex stood alone with

Joe Joe in that empty shadowy space. He felt, himself, empty and shadowy; his head, light; his legs, wobbly. It was as though he needed something to eat, but he knew that food would choke him.

He tried to throw heartiness into his voice.

"Christmas! This is fine!" he said. But as Joe Joe made no response, he abandoned that line in relief. "Joe, will you tell my mother?"

"Yep," said Joe Joe. "What shall I tell her?"

"Go up to the house when the old man's off to the bank. Tell her I'm gone and tell . . ."

In the instant's pause he saw his mother, her tender mouth, her timid fluttering lids. He knew without her asking what she would want to know.

"Tell her I'm gone," he repeated, "and tell her . . . tell her . . ." He stared upward. "Tell her I'll be a good boy."

Joe Joe's tightly locked arms unfolded, and one of them slid within his friend's.

"Sure I will. And I'll tell her I put you on the train all safe and sound. And I'll tell her you're going to make your everlasting fame and fortune."

"Thanks," Alex rumbled and for some moments continued to stare upward.

XVIII

AS softly played music is diffused through a feast or a wedding or a scene upon the stage, so Virginie was diffused, impalpably yet completely, through Alex's first season on the road. She permeated it; she colored it; she spiced it. Alex did not realize until long after how absolutely this was true. He saw through her eyes, heard through her ears, that winter. She interpenetrated the texture of his dreams.

He had never before seen such a lady! Very beautiful, she was! All the more so, he thought, for the shadows which rested beneath her black-lashed, yellow-flecked green eyes. All the more so for the delicate tired lines which etched her mouth. Her figure was slender, but at the same time voluptuous. Molded into the basque of the day, her hips and waist and bosom rose seductively from the flowered polonaise. Her hands, so living and gay; her feet, so high-arched and slim: Alex found a thousand things about her to adore.

And her beauty, he often told himself, was the least of it. He took a solemn personal pride in her greatness. She was, indeed, a figure of importance in the troupe. Although her mellow voice was not to

be compared with the glorious organ possessed by Tom Angel's Dora, who was a blooming beauty as well, no one dreamed of replacing her as leading contralto. Besides her knowledge of music, there was her gift of languages. She conversed with Annunziata Angel and the Marinos in their own tongue. She composed the French phrases which ornamented their playbills.

And she was, Alex fathomed with a thrill of satisfaction, very much a woman of the world. He was fervently admiring of her bored manner, of the lazy laughter ever present in her voice. She laughed at him continuously, and yet her kindness . . . Nothing in his experience had ever equaled her overflowing kindness.

She insisted that Benjy put him in as Bill Bobstay. Shortly the rôle of Dick Deadeye was maneuvered into his hands. The lad who was playing the part had been recruited from a church choir in Iowa and was, indeed, entirely inadequate. She taught him his lines and his music; and his natural comedy sense helped him to play the villainous Dick to the delight of country audiences.

This securing for him of a really excellent part was but one of Virginie's favors. Although not a domestic woman, she gave an eye to his buttons and socks. She made him change his boots in wet weather and commanded flannel underwear. The small-town hotels in which they stopped—when, indeed, their

hours of travel allowed of a hotel at all—were heated from stoves in the office and were, commonly, frigid. She sometimes made hot chocolate after the performance, managing it cleverly over a lamp. To this small festivity one or two of the company were invited, and always Alex.

How heavenly kind she was! Like a mother! And yet not like a mother at all. That was what made it so glorious. Alex was, he confided to himself, in love with her. Yet even in his dreams he did not touch her. He did not, somehow, want to touch her. She was his star, his goddess, his glamorous lady. Star was his name for her, used shyly when they were alone.

"Watch out!" the Angels teased him. "Don't fall in love with Jinnie. That's what most of our Dick Deadeyes do."

"I don't wonder," Alex would answer fervently. He did not, as the old Alex would have done, return their stray shots with a fusillade of banter. He had lost for the time being his riotous high spirits and had acquired a new unnatural industry. Nothing seemed of importance to him but winning her approval. He worked continually on his part and had made it, Benjy Angel told him, one of the high comedy spots of the performance.

In spite of their teasing, the Angels were indulgent toward the little romance. Alex knew that Steve Angel had been replaced by an Italian, now long

dead. He did not know that the Italian had had a successor, now, after a purple period, divorced. But the Angels would not for worlds have been tactlessly enlightening. The connection was certainly beneficial to Alex. As for Jinnie, she always blossomed with fresh charm when she had a new adoring boy in tow. Nor did she ever permit such affairs to run out of bound. No, the Angels kept hands off, and they looked on, when they looked at all, with sympathetic interest.

There was in the Angelo Family English Opera Troupe a most amicable spirit. There were few of the antagonisms and petty jealousies that commonly flourish in such groups. This was due in part, of course, to the fact that almost all of them were united by ties of blood or deep affection. And it was undoubtedly sustained by the gentle paternalism with which Benjy ruled them.

How fitly Benjy ruled them! He had the most endearing way of uncovering virtues, of concealing frailties, of humoring weaknesses and of side-stepping troubles. Nothing, it was said in the troupe, made Benjy angry but to hear a supe whistle in the dressing room. And when that happened, as Alex was soon to discover, the offender went into the corridor, turned around three times to the right and said, "I'm a fool."

"And so you are!" Benjy would agree, clumping

off sullenly. Benjy still carried a quill from a certain half-plucked goose.

The company was riding that season on a high wave of prosperity. Therefore it carried a pianist and Benjy had returned to the love of his heart, the violin. He rather fancied himself, wearing the fine new artificial leg which "Pinafore" had brought, his hair cut longer than the next man's, standing in the pit with a violin under his chin. But he was a pianist of no mean parts. In less affluent seasons, Tom told Alex, he furnished the sole accompaniment for a whole repertoire of operas, playing them on the piano with entire equanimity.

"There's nothing," Tom boasted adoringly, "that that one-legged fiddler cannot do. I've known him to sing a part, manage the curtain, shift scenes, attend to properties and take in the money at one and the same performance."

Jenny Lind sang Josephine, sang with the same sweetness that she had sung for Cut Nose, from the kitchen table. She was happier in "Pinafore" than she had been in the operas which preceded it. She was a natural soubrette rather than a prima donna, Benjy insisted.

Annunziata might, in different circumstances, have made a prima donna. She possessed a voice of power and beauty, and she had the Italian's flair for opera. But, as it happened, Nuncy was married to Tim, and Tim was leading tenor, and being a leading tenor's

wife is a woman-sized job in itself. Nuncy handed him lozenges; she wrapped him in shawls; she shielded him from draughts in the wings. Fortunately a hair of Tim's head meant more to Nuncy than the finest high C in existence.

Tim was as different as is possible from Tom, big, good-humored Tom who sang with as much enjoyment as he ate. Tom was the only Angel inclined to stoutness, but he carried his surplus pounds with positive elegance. Tom had, the others agreed, the grand manner. He strode into a dingy railroad eating-house as a king into his castle. This manner of his was invaluable at times, as when suspicious hotel keepers wanted to search the luggage.

Dora sang Hebe. Jenny Lind's Salvatore was Captain Corcoran. And Giovanni Marino, his dark-eyed younger brother, lent a ringing tenor to the chorus. The chorus was admittedly the weak spot in the company, being made up chiefly of children who had passed the point where they could sleep in costume trunks during the performance. Violetta and Stevie, Norma, Raoul and Charlotte, Jenny Lind's Jack—there was no lack of midshipmites in the troupe. The chorus, however, needed bolstering.

"It's certainly good they've got *me*," Sadie confided to Alex, who in return made occasional confidences to her. Sadie, remembering Angel's attachment, thought it just as well that she shared her family's aversion to writing letters.

Of such was the Angelo Family English Opera Troupe which with Alex in its ranks sang "Pinafore" that winter six nights a week with two matinees; sang it in halls and schoolrooms and proud new opera houses; sang it in a zigzag line through Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska; sang it in tiny towns which lay so close together that Tom suggested walking from place to place.

Christmas hurried by, a jumbled dream of Christmas, with fruit cake from Sadie's box and a tree rigged up for the children. The new year hurried in and was some weeks on its way when a snowball changed the course of Alex's life.

Elsie Foss threw the snowball. She had joined the company at Christmas time, another recruit from a small-town church-choir. Violetta and Norma had been having measles, and Sir Joseph had protested at his depleted train, had protested with such vigor that Elsie was acquired.

She was sixteen or thereabouts, a big overgrown girl with a gurgling laugh. She was not at all the type to capture Alex's fancy even had he not been completely enslaved to Virginie. But she was young and abounding in high spirits; and Alex was what is called a natural tease. He teased anything available from school-masters to kittens, and with particular zest he teased the girls. This audacity of his had been of late kept under. It naturally had no play in his contact with his goddess. So it was rather fun to

badger the rosy Elsie, especial fun because of her hearty laugh.

He always carried Virginie's bags to and from the station. They took their meals together and their bite after the show. They were more or less tied to each other by an agreeable routine established, Alex thought, through divinest accident. Yet even such routines—and Virginie knew their value as well as she knew the methods of bringing them about—are not proof against such casual things as . . . snowballs.

Elsie hit him with her snowball, flat on the ear. She ran away then, gurgling laughter, looking back at him fearfully over her shoulder. Alex placed Virginie's bags on the edge of the sidewalk.

"You'd better run!" he called. He stooped for a handful of snow, molded it swiftly and ran in pursuit.

Virginie watched them, smiling. The others watched too, walking more slowly in order to follow the progress of the battle. Alex let fly his ball. Elsie returned one. He loosed a second and a third. She shriekingly capitulated.

The others straggled on, Virginie with them. Alex put a handful of snow down Elsie's collar and threatened to wash her face. They gamboled like two puppies, and when Alex returned to the bags and, breathless and laughter shaken, they proceeded down the walk, some moments had passed.

Moments enough that when they reached the hotel the others had breakfasted. Tom had left for the theater, Benjy for the drug store where the tickets were on sale. Alex and Elsie ate their breakfast alone, and before it was over they had planned to go skating in all of the towns which boasted ponds.

At the chocolate-making that evening, Alex recounted these plans. He and Virginie were alone, as not infrequently happened. At first it seemed strange to Alex for men and women to mingle so informally. But now it was quite unremarkable to sit on the edge of Virginie's bed, while she fussed about in a worn but most becoming velvet wrapper.

"Elsie brought skates," he said, "but I had to buy mine. No pie for a month! It'll be worth it though to cut a pigeon-wing again."

Virginie, stirring the chocolate, said without looking up, "I'm afraid I've lost my cavalier."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"You're tired of your old lady."

That, of course, was a delicious joke.

"Yes, you've lost me, Star," he said.

"Really?"

"I'm sure you're worried."

He sat there watching her, the droop of her auburn hair, the blue velvet sleeve falling away from a wrist as white as snow. It was wasting breath to say more—she was only joking—but he could not resist and added with sober shyness:

"You . . . you couldn't lose me to a regiment of Elsies."

He waited then, unconsciously, for her lovely lazy laugh. To his surprise it did not come.

"I'm glad, Alex," she said. And across her upturned face glanced an amazing expression. Was it? . . . but, no, it couldn't be relief.

"Charming boy!" she continued in her familiar bantering manner. "Now hand me the cups."

Later, in his room, he recalled that expression briefly. He decided again that he had been mistaken. Great ladies like Star weren't jealous of tomboys like Elsie. Why, if he *were* in love with Elsie or with anybody else, Star would be the first person he would tell. He was in love with her too, of course, but that was different.

Alex and Elsie had their skating on the afternoon following and on several afternoons thereafter. The expeditions were anything but romantic. They were amusing, however, according to the accounts given at the supper table. Alex had a tongue for foolishness; and the cold meat, fried potatoes, stewed fruit and green tea were pleasantly enlivened by his tales. Various ones of the company went themselves to watch the antics and one day, at Alex's urging, Virginie went too.

Her figure on the bank with its smart bonnet and dolman inspired him to dashing effort. His arm locked in Elsie's, he cut his finest scrolls. But al-

though her gaze followed them, she did not appear to be pleased. She turned away early; and when in the wings that night Alex asked her whether she had enjoyed it, she said in a bored way that Elsie laughed too loudly.

"Yes, she does," said Alex slowly. It seemed unkind to say so. "Of course," he went on thoughtfully, "you couldn't expect her to have *your* lovely laugh."

Strangely enough that seemed to please Virginie. Didn't she know, hadn't any one told her, that her laugh was like the music of a harp?

That day, as it happened, they had missed the time together which was usually spent working on Alex's voice. Alex mentioned it regretfully when taking leave of Virginie after the chocolate-drinking.

"Perhaps," said Virginie lightly, "I've been meaning to ask you . . . perhaps you'd rather we gave up the lessons?"

"Oh, no!" cried Alex; then added anxiously, "unless you're tired of them?"

"No, I'm not tired of them. She turned away to lower the flame of her lamp. "But they take so much time from your skating."

"From my skating?"

"Yes, from your skating and . . . Elsie."

Alex poked his hands down in his pockets, threw back his red head and laughed.

"Do you think," he asked, "that I'm in love with this Elsie?"

"Not yet."

"I wouldn't ever be. Not in a thousand years."

"Yes, you would." Why, she was serious! The words came slowly, reluctantly, as if she spoke them against her will. "Yes, you would. You're both young. And when you're together all the time . . ."

"See here," said Alex. He too was serious now. "Would it please you if I'd not skate with Elsie any more?"

"I'm just that silly, Alex."

"Very well. I promise." He held out his hand.

She did not take it at once, but Alex persisted.

"Listen to me, Star. I've been wishing and wishing I could do something for you. I'd have liked it to be something big—saving you from drowning or being run down by a train—something like that. Well, there hasn't been any big thing I could do. I'm sorry. But if this little thing, this silly little thing will really please you, for God's sake let me do it."

She looked at him oddly.

"Why do you wish to do something for me?"

"Because . . . because you've been so good to me, I suppose."

"Yes," she said wistfully, "I have been good to you. And I've been good *for* you, haven't I, Alex? Up to now. Even Benjy would say that."

"Well, take my promise. Please, Star."

She gave him her hand.

She gave him her hand, and he made the promise.

And it had all been true, what Alex had said. He had wished and wished to do something for her. He had lain awake at night, seeking the thing. But the sacrifices he had planned had been big and splendid. This was so silly . . . hurting a child, giving up his skates. He felt that his love had been cheapened. He felt hurt and angry both with himself and with her.

He attempted to hide his changed feeling. He was sure that he did not succeed. Star was so wise, so divinely farseeing. She knew that she had fallen. She had known, he reasoned miserably, when she accepted his hand. That was why she had paused. And even now, he was certain, she could help him if she would. She could restore herself to his heaven, a luminous planet.

To do so, however, seemed far from her intention. She acted actually like a frightened child. She stayed very close for the next few days to Benjy, as if seeking his protection. She maneuvered Alex from his usual place beside her, at the table, on the train. When he dropped into her dressing room or her room after the show, he was sure to find somebody there.

He accused her of this one day a week later as they stood together in the wings. They were rehearsing "The Chimes of Normandy," with which Benjy planned to succeed "Pinafore."

"Hang it all," he said, scowling at her. "What have I done?"

She answered without coquetry, "I'm not good for you, Alex."

"You're not *good* for me?" he repeated in complete exasperation. "See here!"

He caught her sleeve and turned her toward him. She was a tall woman, but with his six feet, two inches of attenuated boyish height, he was taller than she. His rampant red head lifted above her. His blue eyes, bright with anger, looked down into hers.

She answered his look straightly for a moment, but curiously her expression changed. Those thick black lashes of hers had something to do with it. They swept together, and when they opened again the eyes were different. There was a liquid softness in them which warmed him furiously, like wine. She was looking badly, pale; and her closely tied black bonnet was not becoming. She did not touch him. She never, he remembered, touched him. It was just that look in her eyes which caused warmth to flood out and down his body, like the warmth from wine.

A little smile alighted on her lips.

"The idea! You scolding me!" she said. "You're the one to be scolded."

"Why?" He could not take his eyes away. "Why should I be scolded?"

"Because you made me take a promise and then were angry that I did."

"I wasn't. I . . . wasn't."

"Poor little boy!" She put her hand on his, and

her touch rushed ecstatically through him, just as her look had done. "Poor little boy! Giving up his sweetheart!"

"Star! What do I care for that tomboy?"

"It was the skating, then?"

> "On billow rocking,
> At tempest mocking,
> Gallant sailor boy, Ocean's thy home."

Tim was singing, his strong sweet voice undulating caressingly to Grenicheux's barcarolle. Alex snatched Virginie into his arms. Strong young arms, they were, and they held her tightly. After a moment her upturned mouth found his.

"Germaine! Where's Germaine?" Benjy was pounding the piano.

"Here's Germaine," called Virginie soothingly.

She disengaged herself, straightened the ties of her bonnet, gave Alex a slantwise smile.

She went with her slow saunter out to the stage, and Alex stood where she had left him, trembling. Although Tim had stopped singing, the barcarolle swung on in his head.

XIX

THE John house—already, in that day of Protean values, "the old John house"—sustained some staggering changes the following summer.

Down came the staring portraits of Grandfather and Grandmother John, the Boydell engravings of scenes from Shakespeare, the colored pictures of the presidents. Up went The Huguenot Lovers and the charming Princess Potocka.

Out went the horsehair furniture, the marble-topped center table, the wreaths made of seeds and nuts and braided human hair. In came purple plush and patent rockers and fringed and beaded portières.

Out went also the must of middle age, the silence and chill of loneliness and of staling disappointments. In came the rattle of teacups, the chime of youthful voices and the click of croquet balls on the lawn.

The basket in the hall was heaped high with visiting cards on which the fancy printer had done his worst.

Angel was home from school.

Angel was home from school in a tilter bustle.

Angel was home from school in a boned basque and looped polonaise. Angel was home from school with ruffles and flounces, pleatings and flutings, encircling her tiny feet.

Sitting at the square piano and singing "The Blue Alsatian Mountains," Angel broke many hearts that summer.

> "Adé, Adé, Adé,
> Such songs shall pass away . . ."

She had a trick of shaking her little head—she intended it to be mournful—but the swing of the golden ladders in her ears was anything but sad.

Even David John, listening from his study, enjoyed her singing. She did not sing like an Angel, but like a young lady from the seminary.

Angel's childish vow renouncing music had been renewed on her visit to Vermont. She had had from the lips of an old aunt the story of her father and mother. She had seen the proud exultant letters that young David John had written from the cottage. She had seen the message, stiff, cold, as though his heart were frozen, in which he told of Fanny's going.

"I'll never leave him, never. Not unless he sends me away," she resolved. And she put music out of her life as Fanny could never have done. For David John had come "from the old granite state," as it was styled by the minstrels of his youth; and he had bequeathed to Angel a layer of this granite which united

oddly with the froth she had from Fanny. That jewel-blue gaze looking out from her small vivid face was the John looking out from the Angel. Very earnestly, a trifle anxiously, it looked. Perhaps a John had never found itself before in so unlikely a place.

Angel had, at all events, the strength to make her sacrifice. But it reacted on her as sacrifices do. A tree, cut off from the sun, takes on contours unintended by nature. Angel, deprived of her music, found new and alien interests. She was determined to fill her life, and she filled it with clothes and beaux. She filled it with all the frivolity that the valley afforded.

Angel had been unhappy in her childhood because she felt alone. Always she felt alone, although other little girls were skipping rope and bouncing balls at her elbow. And she was alone now among the belles of Cloudman. She was never quite initiate into their sisterhood. But she did the same crewel work and danced the same steps. She was asked to the picnics and sewing-bees and hops which followed each other that summer as lilacs and snowballs and peonies followed each other on the lawn. And she pretended that she belonged—how gallantly she pretended!—while the sisterhood pretended even harder than she.

For Angel was not only pretty and rich, with that aura about her which Cloudman defined as "swell."

She possessed a gift much esteemed by the local maids. She gathered beaux like roses and discarded them as lightly, having always one or two to spare for her less fortunate friends.

When she drove downtown for her father, daintily holding the ribbons and smilingly directing the high-stepping Dolly and Duke, she halted business on River Street as a circus parade might have done.

"Honestly," Joe Joe told her, "I'm not in the swim at all, because I'm not in love with Angel John."

She was not long in sensing that sweethearts brought prestige; and she added by flirtation to the number. Nor did she neglect to knot fast to her chariot wheel the most desirable among them.

The most desirable was, of course, Fred Tincher; why, it is more difficult to say. Why does any town brevet in this manner some otherwise unnoteworthy young man? The senior Tincher kept in shop, and manufactured to order, carriages, buggies, wagons, sleighs and bob-sleds. The son, returning from a year at the state university, assisted his father, and they were but modestly rewarded. The parents had been pioneers in Cloudman. That gave them aristocratic standing. For the rest, Fred was slight of build, fastidious of dress, with fresh cheeks and pleasant friendly manners. And he was a smooth and admirable dancer.

Angel bestowed on him the privilege, significant

in Cloudman, of coming to her home for Sunday supper. She accepted him as escort for those hops which ranked as balls, and went riding frequently in his new top-buggy. She had even, on occasion, allowed a good-night kiss and been flecked with agreeable excitement. She knew that she could marry him and that some day she might, and she felt a bit elated at the knowledge.

But sometimes, thinking of it in the silence of the night, she was shaken by a devastating loneliness.

"If I marry him," she thought, in those rare moments of insight, "if I marry him, I'll always be lonely, always, till I die. Maybe everybody's lonely. Maybe life's like that."

And yet she was not lonely with Joe Joe. With Joe Joe she did not pretend, did not bury the real Angel deep, not even with this strangely blighted Joe Joe who replaced the charming comrade of her childhood.

Joe Joe, with Fred Tincher and one or two others of his class, had gone up to the state university. He had followed his father's wishes and enrolled for pre-medical work. But Joe Joe was not a scholar; and at Christmas had come home—a failure.

His father had been kind, in spite of bitter disappointment. It would have been easier, Joe Joe thought, if his father had been harsh. Then they would have quarreled, and Joe Joe would have gone off to the troupe which lay like a golden cloud on

the horizon of his dreams. His father had been kind, however, and Joe Joe had taken a position in Burr's drug-store. A drug clerk, he reasoned, was almost the same as a doctor. The act had been an unspoken plea for forgiveness, a dumb pathetic gesture of remorse. But his father did not appear to see its significance; he did not change his attitude of labored kindliness; and Joe Joe was soon a failure as a drug clerk as well.

Not a total failure, perhaps. He was faithful to his duties and still held his position after half a year. But Mr. Burr confessed himself disappointed. He had expected such a well-favored and popular young chap to draw folks into the store. Joe Joe had changed completely, had become silent, sullen, morose, almost beyond recognition.

He dropped the pleasant young set in which he had always moved. He wanted to do what dropping was done, he told Angel stubbornly. He joined the town's pool and billiard players, the more or less profligate young men who took out to dances not the daughters of their fathers' friends but the daughters of the foreigners in the east end of town. He avoided Angel and refused her invitations until she was hurt; and she at last resolved to trouble him no more.

But she was out riding with Fred one day, on that tender, locust-shaded road around Blue Lake, when he laughingly called her attention to a buggy ahead. The horse which drew it was going very

slowly; the lines were plainly wound around the whip; and the occupants were clasped in an embrace.

When they passed this buggy, Angel saw that the amorous pair were Joe Joe and a tousle-headed girl from East Cloudman.

Hilma Hanson was pretty in a way, with fluffy light hair and an empty blue gaze, but she was untidy, noisy and silly and, Angel realized vaguely, not supposed to be nice. She realized this more sharply now because of Fred.

He seemed embarrassed, and yet he increased his attentions. It was as if he were saying, "I like you even if your cousin *does* go out with Hilma Hanson." Angel, who, because of Joe Joe's obvious discomfort, had passed with only a smiling "Hello" was sorry that she had not stopped and chatted. She was angry with Fred, worried and bewildered.

The next day in her most becoming costume—a black tulle polonaise with a skirt of currant-red satin and a bonnet with nodding red feathers—she drove to Burr's drug-store.

Joe Joe came out reluctantly, in response to her beckoning whip. He looked, she thought with irritation, positively hang-dog, his suit out of press, his hair, which used to shine like satin, rumpled as by a troubled hand. But his black eyes, which also used to shine, were heavy with unhappiness, and as she looked into them her irritation vanished. Reaching out, she gave his hand an affectionate squeeze.

"Now kindly explain," she said, "why you never come to see me any more."

Joe Joe, as he had always done of late, took refuge in pleasantry.

"Busy," he said. "Lor' bless me, lady, but I'm busy. Weighing pills, wrapping powders . . ."

"Tut," said Angel. "You find time to take pretty girls out riding."

Joe Joe smiled faintly.

"Not so pretty as you, Angela mia. You certainly are a dream in that outfit. Now if only old Tincher would drop by!"

"Joe Joe," said Angel impulsively, "I care more for you than a hundred Tinchers. But . . . what's the matter with us, Joe Joe?" Tears came into her eyes.

"Nothing," answered Joe Joe restlessly. "What's wrong? Why the weeps? Didn't I come to your damn lawn-tennis party?"

"Yes," said Angel indignantly, through tears. "You came and sat behind the arbor with Charley Pratt all afternoon. I wanted you to spark Debbie Walker. I told you so."

"Well, I'll spark who I like," he said sharply. Then, casting off his ill-humor, he bent toward her. "Oh, Angel, if only I could *do* what I like! If only I could! I'd be a different person. I give you my word, I would."

"I know it," said Angel and dried her eyes and

sat silent for a moment. "Have you asked Uncle lately?"

"I'll never ask him again. I can't bear to hurt him. If only I wasn't so chicken hearted! If only I had the nerve to cut off like Alex did."

"Do you hear from Alex?"

"I haven't for six months. He was singing a part, he said. And Aunt Jinnie had been awfully good to him."

"She would be," said Angel. "She's a darling."

Unwillingly, at mention of Alex, her dark cheeks had colored a little. She was furiously ashamed of that childish passion. She wished she might meet him and snub him. He hadn't known, of course; it wasn't at all his fault. No matter; she would snub him.

"Suffering humanity," said Joe Joe, "requires my services." He drew himself erect and saluted in farewell, saluted with the charming smile which recalled the old Joe Joe and made painful the realization that she had accomplished nothing.

"Joe Joe," she said, "do something for me."

"If it isn't a lawn-tennis party and sparking a girl."

"It isn't. It's just coming up to the Calico Ball and asking me for a dance."

"That's easy. You're easy to dance with, cousin."

And he stood, still smiling, while she gathered up the reins. She drove off unwillingly. But, she con-

soled herself, she had made an appointment, at least. And at the Calico Ball . . .

The Calico Ball, however, was not written in Joe Joe's stars. Or it was written but dimly. Angel's was the destiny with which that event was entwined, though as yet she did not suspect it. She was, of course, looking forward to the Grand Calico Ball, the first and the big affair of autumn. Gayeties had been few because of President Garfield's tragic injury. But he was reported better now.

The ball would be, *The Item* stated, *recherché*. And *The Item* gave from week to week animating details. A brass band for round dances. A string band for square dances. A magnificent collation to be served. It asked the men to wear full calico suits. (The town tailor would cut them for fifty cents apiece.) Failing calico suits, they were urged to wear calico vests with neckties and lapels of that material.

The ladies' dress was treated in a more jocular manner. The editor did not presume to advise the ladies, he said. Nor did he dare enquire too closely into their plans, for they were maintaining what secrecy their sex was capable of. But he happened to know, he said, that a leading dry-goods merchant had sold a tasty pattern of red calico ringed in white to the fairest daughter of the city.

Red calico ringed in white, a marvel of starched ruffles draped away from a princess basque, was

Angel's dress. Artificial red sweet peas were bunched at her throat and waist. The same gaudy flowers coquetted from her hair. She was more than pleased with herself as she twirled about on her toes before the dingy mirror in the dressing room. And at the dressing-room door was a crowd of impatient young men clamoring for dances. And Fred in the opening waltz was triumphantly proud. The evening began felicitously, but it did not continue so. There was a garnet on Debbie Walker's plump engagement finger.

Now Debbie was Angel's closest friend and also her sharpest rival. And the giver of the garnet was effectually ensnared. He regarded Angel to-night with actual benevolence, although earlier in the summer he had followed in her train. And here was the Calico Ball buzzing with Debbie's news—of the new brick house on Spruce Street, of the wedding trip to the cities, of the wedding itself to be held in the new Congregational Church. It was indisputably vexing.

Then Debbie, beckoning Angel, asked her to be her bridesmaid, and the look on Debbie's face changed Angel's mood. It was a new expression of blissful serenity, the tranquil happy look that converts wear. How horrid it had been of her, Angel thought, to be jealous! That pettiness vanished as if it had never been. And in its place arrived the pervading loneliness which had hitherto come only in solitude.

The brass band struck up "Old Dan Tucker"; the older folks were noisily forming their sets; light from the chandeliers streamed over bright calicos, and Angel felt an abject desolation. Fred thought the reel old-fashioned, and he approached her now to ask if she would step out for ice cream. And when in a mauve September street, swept with thin moonlight, he asked her if they couldn't do as Debbie and John had done, she hastily said yes.

He slipped his arms about her and kissed her several times. Angel returned his kisses with a fervor that surprised him, but she found her loneliness unassuaged.

"There. Not any more," she said abruptly, pulling away.

"Why, Angel! We're engaged, aren't we?"

"Not until you talk with Father."

This was subterfuge; she knew it. She knew that her father would be fully content with this marriage. He would feel, in fact, that his dearest wish was gratified, if Angel, of her own choice, married and stayed in Cloudman.

"Why should he mind?" asked Fred, a little nettled. He did not, Angel realized with a tug of irritation, depreciate himself. Indeed, his stiffness as they walked back to the hall implied that she failed to appreciate the honor he had done her.

Joe Joe had "stagged" it to the ball and, lacking calico trimmings, had spent most of the evening

smoking on the stairs. He approached her now to claim his dance.

"What's up?" he demanded with his first glimpse of her. "You're pale as a ghost."

Angel strove for Debbie's exaltation.

"Happiness has come to me, Joe Joe."

"Happiness? Not the kind that's come to Debbie?"

"Yes. Just that kind."

But it was difficult to maintain the mood. Joe Joe said nothing appropriate. And the rollicking "Can't Stop Gallop" shook her high gravity from her.

"Well," she demanded petulantly when they had circled the hall, "don't you think it's good news?"

"It'll be nice for me," he answered, "to have you in Cloudman."

"Then why are you so gloomy?"

"Oh, nothing." But in a moment he blurted out. "I've thought of you, Angel, as a . . . Clara Louise Kellogg. Not as a Debbie, exchanging recipes and patterns."

Tears smarted in Angel's eyes.

"I think you're horrid. You know I can't leave Father. Do you want me to be an old maid just because I have to stay here?"

"Come, now. Don't be cross!" He was the old teasing Joe Joe. "I'll promise to dance with Debbie all through your wedding."

"But now she's engaged to somebody else!" Angel laughed through angry tears.

It was, she repeated to herself as he left her, horrid of him. Rejoining Fred, she plunged into flirtation. Fred didn't know that those sparkling blue glances were defiance of Joe Joe. They went to his head. During a waltz, "The Thousand and One Nights," with Angel a languorous breeze in his arms, he asked her if she wouldn't go home.

"Home? But it isn't midnight."

"We might find your father still up."

"What if we did?" She turned her black head away.

"Then we could get his . . . what-do-you-call-it . . . blessing."

"But what if we did?" The black head turned still farther.

"Why, we'd be engaged, little witch! And you couldn't hold me off."

"Oh, in that case . . ." The black head drooped. ". . . I don't think I'll go."

But they went, stealing down the bare stairs, to the empty moonlit street.

There was, as Angel had known there would be, a light in the study. Her father had a habit of reading late. Angel went off, singing, to hang up her wraps, to fluff her hair and peep with a smile in the mirror. Fred nervously cleared his throat and rapped at the study door.

Ten minutes passed, and he reappeared, beckoning her. Angel ran to him in the doorway. With her sure instinct for drama, she slipped into his arms and turned a smiling, expectant face to her father. He sat in his dressing-gown under the lamp, a gaunt bearded man. Angel saw with surprise that he held himself rigidly, as though braced to perform a disagreeable duty.

"Fred tells me," he said, "that you want to become engaged."

"Yes, Father." Her lashes fell.

"I have told him," he went on slowly, "that such an outcome would please me, provided . . . that you give certain answers to some questions I want to put to you."

"Yes, Father."

"Come here, Angel."

She left Fred's sheltering arm, and her coquetry fell from her. She looked into her father's eyes with eyes that were like his own. For several weighted moments there was silence in the room.

"You love Fred and want to marry him," her father began slowly. "But, Angel, if I should die . . . if I should die and leave you free to do whatever you wished, what would you do?"

"Why, I . . ." Angel stopped. Her eyes that were like his own looked to the floor, looked to the wall, looked to the book-laden table.

Fred spoke in a quick annoyed voice.

"She'd marry me, of course. What possible difference could that make, Mr. John?"

"I'd . . . I'd . . ."

Her voice was low and tapered off to a whisper. Her eyes continued their roving about the room. But they did not look at her father, still rigid in his chair, and they did not look at Fred who broke in testily:

"Now, Mr. John! She'd marry me. And once we were married, you can bet she'd be all right. A girl's safe when she's married."

"Yes," said David dryly, "I'm coming to that."

Again the weighted silence fell. Again he looked at Angel, who felt his eyes upon her though her own did not meet his. She twitched a red sweet pea from her dress and tore it to pieces with nervously fierce fingers.

"If you were married, Angel; if you were happily married; if you were happily married as your mother was married to me, and I died . . ."

"I don't know!" cried Angel wildly. "I don't know!"

She threw her hands to her face and began to sob. Fred hurried wrathfully forward. But David John's voice in its urgency hushed Angel's sobs and halted Fred where he stood.

"I want you to tell me truthfully, Angel. If you were married and living here in Cloudman and doing

housework and caring for a baby, and Benjy needed a soprano and wrote and told you so . . ."

"I'd go!" said Angel. "I'd go with the troupe!" Her voice rang out like a bell. She stood erect, and her eyes looked straight into his.

David John walked the length of the room.

"There's your answer, Fred," he said with a forced and artificial briskness as he returned. "There's your answer. Your pride's hurt. I know, boy. But nothing to what it would have been later on. No one knows of this but us, and we'll forget it. You never asked for Angel."

Fred was gone. Two doors reverberated behind him. David turned to his daughter and his face, though ashy and compressed into weird deep lines, was gentle.

"Sit down, Angel. Sit down, dear. It's not your fault, but I couldn't let him suffer. I've tried to bring you up like other Cloudman girls, to make you just a blessed homekeeping woman. But if I've failed, why, I've failed, that's all. I'll write your Uncle Benjy to ask if they've a place for you."

"But, Father!" With a passionate cry, Angel was in his arms. "I don't want to leave you, Father. I was telling the truth . . . about what I'd do if you weren't here. But you *are* here. And I want to stay with you."

Her slim arms clutched him. Her wet face dug desperately into his coat.

"But I won't let you. I can't permit it, Angel." The lines in his face cut deeper as he detached her.

"I won't go."

"I command it, Angel."

Her arms dropped free of him, then. Her head dropped too. And with her despairing acquiescence, his hand fell on her shoulder.

"Maybe you'll do big things, make me proud of you, Angel."

Those were good words for David John to speak; good, because so bitterly hard, fetched up as they were from a black morass of hurt pride and disappointment. But they lifted Angel's head as the sun lifts a dahlia.

"I will, Father, I will!" she cried with utter joy.

XX

ANGEL was not frightened by the smoky black cavern of a railroad station. Her heart thumped, to be sure; she felt that it might burst her tightly buttoned astrakhan jacket. Her fingers squeezed the handle of her grip; and her eyes, searching the crowd, strained widely open. But it wasn't fear, this excitement which leapt like a fountain within her. It wasn't fear, she was certain, which made her so glad to identify Uncle Benjy.

He was unmistakable, Uncle Benjy. And regarding him now, before he had discovered her, she found a touch of quaintness in the tall, thin figure of which she had been unconscious in her childhood. Or perhaps it had only come to him with years? He held himself erect with a gold-headed cane, but the artificial limb within the trouser leg was plain. His stovepipe hat was in his hand, and his bared black head had a look of youthful gallantry.

The cane, the high silk hat, striped trousers and long coat were elegance itself. Yet he wore no overcoat, and it was five o'clock of a raw November day. Angel noted this as she swept down upon him and interrupted with a hug the beginning of a masterly bow.

"Oh, Uncle Benjy! I'm so very glad to see you."

"Well, well! Little Angel! Come to pay us a visit, eh?"

"Visit! I've come to join your troupe and you know it as well as I do. You're afraid I'll flat or sharp or do some other dreadful thing."

"I am, am I, sauce-box?"

Twinkling at her in the mischievous way she remembered, he led her to the door. He assisted her with care into an open weather-beaten hack, which threaded its way through carriages and horse-cars down a muddy street.

"I didn't tell your father, for we all wanted a look at you, but the truth of the matter is, we're resting just now," her uncle remarked.

"Are you?"

"We're getting up in 'Mascot' and 'Patience.' Keeping busy, of course. But we all needed a rest after two years of 'Pinafore,' and I put my foot flat down."

"I've heard 'Pinafore.' I love it," said Angel.

"Oh, 'Pinafore's' well enough, and these other operettas. But I think back to the days when we did regular stuff—'Martha' and 'Crown Diamonds' and 'Linda da Chamounix!' The public appreciated high-class music, then."

Chicago, Angel remarked, was a very dirty city. Uncle Benjy agreed. It was near the soft-coal fields,

he explained, and everything was smooched with the meanest dust on earth.

The street into which they had moved was, Angel assented, smooched. Moreover, it edged the greasy Chicago River. The building at which their carriage stopped was built over the river—four stories of smoke-grimed brick. Angel peered up at it in the swiftly gathering dusk, a dusk as grayly smooched as the street itself. She wasn't at all frightened, but again excitement leapt like a quivering fountain in her breast.

Uncle Benjy was arguing with the driver. She heard him say, "You wouldn't take a pass to 'Yorick's Love,' would you, my man?" The man mumbled reply, and Benjy urged invitingly, "Good balcony seats for you and your lady?"

Angel considered offering her purse. But that cane? That splendid hat? While she hesitated, the man accepted the pass and Uncle Benjy scribbled against the wheel.

Taking Angel's arm, he led her into the building. A hall ran straight from front to back. Climbing out of the hall were some very dirty stairs, which they ascended. The Angelos, Angel knew, could not fill the entire building, but it seemed to house one family. All the doors were open, and people called out to each other, above the noisy hiss of frying chops.

"They're all professional folks," Uncle Benjy explained. "Professional folks of one sort or another.

Some from the legit. And just now there's a pack of circus people here."

It looked very cheerful, Angel thought. A man was chinning himself in a lighted doorway. She smiled at him in passing in an attempt to convey that she thought his action the most natural in the world.

"*Bon jour,* Arditi," called a tall old man in shirt-sleeves.

"Howdy, Ned Booth," Uncle Benjy replied.

"Is that really Edwin Booth?" Angel clutched his arm.

"Either him or Larry Barrett," chuckled Uncle Benjy.

They turned into an inside room, lighted by day from a skylight, although now a clean lamp filled it with yellow light. It held a high-backed wooden bed, a commode with wash-bowl and pitcher, an oil-cloth-covered table and a soft-coal cook-stove. Over the latter, a large stout man, coatless and collarless, was bending. In the corner sat Aunt Dora, nursing a baby. And when the man turned about, he proved to be Uncle Tom, handsome and suave and unabashed by the long fork in his hand.

"Angel! She *is* an angel, isn't she, Dora?"

He came forward to kiss her, and Dora sprang up, handing the baby to Benjy, who accepted it casually.

"Isn't she sweet in that astrakhan jacket and cap?"

"God! How like Fanny! It gives one a start, eh, Benjy?"

"She could never be Fanny with those big blue eyes."

Angel's amused embarrassment at these enthusiastic comments was relieved by a query from Dora.

"Shall I tell the others she's come?" she asked, apparently quite ready to run down the hall in her dressing-sacque.

"No, no. Let's get the child fed before they discover it."

Uncle Benjy closed the door, and, removing the cap and jacket, Angel washed her hands and face at the bowl. But she had scarcely dried them when the tall old man who had hailed Uncle Benjy put his wrinkled face around the door.

"Through with those traps, Arditi?"

"Yes, yes. Come in." Uncle Benjy presented Mr. Cyril Farnsworth; and while he made the introtroduction, he took the hat and cane from the bed where he had placed them, dusted off the former with his sleeve, polished the latter with his handkerchief and returned them to their owner. He was so completely unabashed by the business that Angel's sympathetic confusion passed into secret glee.

"Epstein told me to drop around this evening. He has a fine part for me in a big new production," stated Farnsworth. Coated, hatted and caned, he would never have been recognized as the disheveled

party to the encounter in the hall. Nor would Uncle Benjy, darting about with his familiar short cane, assisting Dora at setting the table, have passed for the figure of fashion which had greeted Angel at the train.

Presently they sat down to raw fried potatoes, sausages and excellent strong coffee.

"Angel says she's really come to join the troupe," Uncle Benjy volunteered.

"I hope we get going sometime," Tom Angel sighed. "I suppose Benjy's told you our hard luck, how we lost our 'Pinafore' profits? Buying race-horses in Kentucky, confound their hides!"

As she had been before, Angel was again unnecessarily concerned for Uncle Benjy. Her blushes cooled when she observed that he was not at all dismayed by Tom's revelation. He seemed to have forgotten his fiction about resting.

"Colic!" he murmured regretfully, replenishing his coffee which he drank without cream or sugar. "If luck hadn't been against us, we'd have made enough to take out a repertoire of operas."

"What will you do now?" asked Angel warily.

"Oh, 'Pinafore' again. Jenks is out booking us, but brother Joseph will have to give us a little financial assistance before we are able to start."

"Old Joe will help," said Tom reassuringly.

Abandoning the sordid subject, Uncle Benjy turned his twinkling eyes on Angel.

"I haven't heard you sing since you were a little girl."

"Sing for us, Angel!" cried Dora.

Although no piano, violin or other means of accompaniment was visible, the request had evidently been made in all seriousness. With a mental note of thanks for her ability to strike pitch, Angel started "Happy Little Maiden." Clara Louise Kellogg had sung it at a recent concert in Cloudman when she and Brignoli had packed the opera house with the awestruck music lovers of the Minnesota Valley. Angel imitated the Kellogg manner, rather successfully, she thought, but a shade of disappointment passed over Uncle Benjy's face.

The quality of Angel's voice was pure and thrilling; and she stood on her little French heels with an admirable poise. She still sang, however, like a young lady from the seminary.

Benjy had no chance to comment, for when she had finished the doorway was full of people.

"Angel, precious!"

"Sadie!"

With a pretty rustling hug, the cousins were reunited.

And other young cousins catapulted upon her. And Aunt Jenny Lind, Uncle Tim, Aunt Nuncy came up behind. All but relatives were barred, Uncle Benjy shouted; shouted to no avail. Bubbling with

the same delight that the Angels manifested, their sympathetic housemates poured into the room.

Angel was looking for Alex. She told herself she wasn't. She told herself that it was a matter of indifference to her whether he came or not. And when she could no longer disguise the fact that her eyes were searching for him, she admitted that it might be pleasant to see him, merely to show him how unimportant he was. She would be cordial, she planned, but vague—as if she had difficulty in placing him. She was rehearsing the speech, behind her murmur of greetings, when his red head appeared in the doorway.

His red head appeared in the doorway and her speech flew out of it; flew somewhere, at least, far from her parted lips. For his bright thatch towered above the others, even above the tall head of Aunt Jinnie who preceded him. And he carried it in the arrogant way she remembered. And he still had those dancing snowflakes in his eyes. She fell on Aunt Jinnie with a rush of words.

"I'm so glad to see you!" she cried, but it came to her as she spoke that Aunt Jinnie had changed, was obscurely less lovely. "I'm so glad to see you! You can't imagine what you meant to me when I was a tiny girl."

That had been wrong. Aunt Jinnie winced sharply. And Angel found discomfort in Alex's face, in the faces of the others to whom she turned.

"You see," she went on hurriedly, "Uncle Joseph always told me such romantic stories about you." That, also, was wrong. Angel felt like Alice in Wonderland, dealing with the sensitive mouse. "Uncle Steve . . . dying in the Civil War and all . . . was such a hero to us. And you were his wife."

"She's mine now," said Alex.

His words struck a gong somewhere—in Angel's heart, perhaps. It seemed to her that a shocked silence had fallen. But the chatter was going on as before; presently, she heard it, heard even her own voice, saying, "Why, that's the most romantic thing of all. Congratulations, Alex!"

Slowly, the small room cleared of all but the company. Those who were working left for their theaters; others went to make use of passes which fluttered about like autumn leaves. Uncle Benjy explained to a matronly woman the use he had made of his pass to "Yorick's Love." Angel laughed with the rest, and slowly her world righted itself with Alex married to Aunt Virginie.

There were Angels, Angels everywhere, on the bed, on the floor. Some one suggested that they send out for beer with which to celebrate Angel's arrival. Angel who had signed the pledge and had never smelled beer except through the sinful swinging doors of The Corner Café, was aghast at first. But the procedure seemed innocent enough.

Dora emptied the pitcher from the washbowl, wiped it out well. Tom called for volunteers to chip in five cents apiece. Alex took the pitcher and the coins and went out followed by cries of, "Let the beer settle, Alex! Get us our money's worth, boy." While he was gone, cousins scuttled into other rooms for tea-cups, for crackers, pickles, cheese; and shortly Angel was sipping a disagreeable fluid and endeavoring to answer a dozen questions at once.

"Joe Joe is very well. Yes, and doing well. Of course, he'd rather be with you." The question came from Alex whose eyes still disconcerted her, and she turned hurriedly to Sadie. "That reminds me. He said that when you went away, he lent you his concertina. And if you're all through with it, he'd like it back, for he can't find another . . ."

"Oh, I've lost that concertina!" Sadie said mournfully. She turned a troubled face to the room. "Wasn't that in the trunk I left in Cincinnati?"

"I think it was Louisville, dear," Aunt Jenny Lind answered.

"No, the trunk I brought from home was the one I left in Cincinnati. Don't you remember I felt badly about it at the time?"

"I suppose," said Angel, "you *do* lose trunks, traveling about so much."

This, for some reason, stirred up laughter. How merry they were! thought Angel, and within the swarming cheerful room she saw in miniature the

silent, turreted house at the corner of Willow and First streets. Her heart opened suddenly, like embracing arms, to her father. Yet, she admitted, she was happy to be where she was. She was happy to be sitting here on the floor with her foot tucked under her. And as for Alex . . . why shouldn't he be married? And every one knew that stage women never grow old. Across the noisy room, she shot a smile at him, for she found his puzzled, bright-blue eyes upon her.

XXI

THEY left Chicago in December; striking south through Indiana and Ohio and north through Michigan, singing "Pinafore" in one-night stands to houses which grew consistently smaller.

The country, Uncle Benjy told Angel, at least twice in every twenty-four hours, had been Pinafored to death. The time had come to forget "Pinafore," and he had known it all along. He had wanted, he reminded her, to take out a repertoire of operettas, "The Chimes of Normandy," "The Pirates of Penzance," "The Mascot," in which the Fay Templeton Company was doing so well, and this spanking new "Olivette." But he hadn't been able to do it, thanks to the race-horses of Louisville, Kentucky, upon whose manes and tails he called down fluent maledictions.

Angel could not judge the value of his plan, but that the country had been Pinafored to death was plain even to her. The Middle West had been combed with "Pinafore" companies. Such companies! They ranged from church-choir troupes, through French troupes, German troupes, negro troupes, and reformed opera bouffe troupes, to rag-tag and bob-tail troupes defying classification. The Boston Ideals

with the great Henry Clay Barnabee stood at the top. Certainly not at the bottom were the minstrel show travesties, Billy Arlington's "Laughable Burlesque Opera on His Royal Nibs' Revenue Cutter Shipafore," and others of that class. Children's companies, too, had sprung up on all sides and were doing a tremendous business. What chance had a "straight" production which, even Benjy admitted, was not one of the best?

For it was only by exercising the greatest economy that they had got going at all. Joseph had done what he could for them, but Flora had been having scarlet fever. They had reduced expenses first, by painting a chorus on the drop, a number of very bright blue sailors with large red mouths wide open. But if canvas mouths do not eat, neither, alas, do they sing, and the nautical choruses were thin. Then Jenny Lind was detained in Chicago by an approaching confinement, and that took Nuncy from Sir Joseph Porter's retinue. Few but the family had been carried on this tour, which fact proved fortunate, as the ghost walked irregularly.

The advance man had made an arrangement whereby the town provided the theater and the company furnished advertising paper and took the first hundred and fifty dollars out of the house. That had sounded reasonable. But who was to foresee that one hundred and fifty dollars would never come into the house? In Springfield, Illinois, Tom Angel

had taken the box receipts and played poker to get the company out of town.

Their financial embarrassment embarrassed Angel for an unusual reason. Her own purse was full. Her father had insisted that she accept an allowance, and far more regularly than pay-day the draft from him arrived. With a youthful eagerness to help but a still more youthful fear of giving offense she had offered her money timidly, at first. She had soon seen that that was nonsense. The Angels shared everything but liquid glue, the sharing of which was supposed to bring bad luck. They availed themselves of her help with pleased alacrity, and Angel, by nature lavish, was as pleased as they. Soon the allowance became common property.

"How many days till the draft, Angela mia?"

"When the draft comes, darling, you may mend these boots, if you like."

"I hope to Heaven Dad's prompt this week!"

David was now "Dad" to all of them, and Angel laughed sometimes, with lashes wet, to hear him thus affectionately mentioned by those of whom he so sternly disapproved.

One-night stands in the heart of winter try the most seasoned trouper. Angel was having a baptism of fire, the company agreed. A baptism it was, but certainly not of fire. The winter was to live in her memory as one long dream of cold.

The dressing room into which she crowded with

Sadie, Dora and the children—that was cold. The railroad station in which they waited for a snail-like midnight train—that was cold. Often toward morning the coach was cold, too, and oh, how hard and knobby were pillows folded over grips! The hotel room which during the day she shared with the other women of the company, one registering for it and the others paying calls on her at intervals —that was unheated. The stage bristled with chilly drafts. And walking to and from the station, late at night or early in the morning, Angel was so whipped and tortured by the biting wind that she thought in desperation she would never be warm again.

And yet she was happy.

"What town is this?" she never failed to ask zestfully of Uncle Benjy who, as traveling manager, herded the rumpled lot of them out of the train.

She relinquished her grip to no one, not she! She wanted the world to see she was an actress.

If only, she lamented privately to Alex, her name were in the roster of the company on the billboards! The advertising sheets were old and made no mention of the recently acquired chorus member. There she was on the program, however—Angel Angelo. And how she worked to merit that line of type!

"Gayly tripping, lightly skipping,
Flock the maidens to the shipping,

Sailors sprightly, always rightly,
Welcome ladies so politely."

She sang and danced as if the success of the evening lay in her joyous throat and nimble toes.

The others, inured to the changeful charm of the life, laughed at her enthusiasm—all but Alex who was fresh, too, from Cloudman, Minnesota.

"It's as if one was being dragged through space by the hair of the head; uncomfortable, but, after one gets used to it, so darned exhilarating!" Alex explained.

As tyros of the troupe, they had much in common. After Alex had carried Virginie's grips on the train and established her comfortably in her seat, he was wont to rove down the aisle to chat with Angel. Angel had always a ripple of laughter for those clownish antics which, he felt, Star thought undignified. And small happenings seemed funny to her, just as they did to him. They could giggle for half an hour over something which, repeated to Star, seemed very childish.

He kept a watchful eye upon her, too. When he saw her shivering on a station platform—for the astrakhan cap and jacket were more becoming than warm—he ran to give her his scarf or to lead her, protestingly, to the stove.

"She's so tiny. She needs some one to look after her," he would say to Virginie.

Alone with Virginie in their hotel room, on those rare occasions when they stayed overnight in a town, things of which Angel should be warned or reminded were forever occurring to him. Sometimes in the midst of a talk or when Virginie was prettily making him comfortable, he would jump up with an abstracted, "Excuse me," and dash down the hall to tap on Angel's door.

"Remember, Angel, we're leaving a five-thirty call." He was, in his anxious attention, more like a mother than a twenty-one-year-old boy.

Angel was grateful. No one looked after her as Alex did. Her uncles and aunts and cousins were kind, but they were so used to trouping! They didn't appreciate, as Alex appreciated, the jump she had taken from Willow Street. As for his being married, that had ceased to trouble her. He was married; and that was as final as being dead. One didn't, she was innocently sure, love a married man any more than one lied or stole or committed murder. And he was happily married, too. He often told her how wonderful Virginie was. Angel only wished that Aunt Virginie liked her better.

For Aunt Virginie, while coolly pleasant, seemed not fond of her any more. The old spontaneous warmth of affection was gone. She did not, as Angel wished she would, encourage a threefold intimacy. Angel had seen once or twice that Alex was trying to make little parties of three, and Virginie had not re-

sponded. Angel wondered if perhaps she took too much of Alex's time. But when she sent him away, he only played poker with the men. And she was very solitary.

There seemed to be no one but Alex with whom she could chum. Sadie was in the throes of a love affair with Giovanni. Nuncy was wrapped up in Tim, as usual; and, besides, she had the children on this trip, and Stevie had been sick ever since they left Chicago, and Violetta was pestering with ambitious interpretations of Shakespeare. Her uncles were forever playing poker. Uncle Benjy talked with her now and then, and he had fascinating stories about her mother and the early concert days, but the merest rattle of chips sent him clumping off down the aisle.

There seemed nothing for Angel but Alex and work; and she divided her time about equally between them.

She knew the proper step for an aspiring prima donna and had promptly taken it. She had memorized the leading soprano rôle. There wasn't a score in the troupe but Uncle Benjy's, the rest had learned their parts so long ago. But Angel devoured every word and note as it fell from Nuncy's lips. She muttered the dialogue to herself on the way to theater and depot. She hummed the music under her breath. On solitary country walks she sang aloud, struggling with the difficulties of the Act One finale.

Overhearing one of these open-air rehearsals on a February afternoon of mild and spring-like disposition, Alex was taken into the secret. "Well," he responded, "you're her understudy, if anybody is."

"Am I?" breathed Angel.

"Of course. She understudied Jenny Lind. And when we came out I guess Benjy never thought about it. Nuncy's so reliable."

"I know she is," said Angel, sighing.

"Just the same, I'll speak to Benjy. And I'll hear you go over your songs as soon as we get back to the hotel. Wouldn't it be fun if you . . ."

"Oh, nothing will happen to Aunt Nuncy."

But when they had returned and were going over, "Sorry her lot who loves too well," in the dim and unaired parlor, Nuncy hurried in. Her braids of black hair, which she wore coiled neatly over her ears, were loosened, and her broad, kindly face was dimmed with worry.

"Angela mia, I hear you singing that song . . . do you know my part?"

"Yes, Aunt Nuncy."

"I wish that Benjy would let you sing it for me to-night." She stared abstractedly at her niece. "My bambino . . . he burns up with fever. And he breathes like this . . . huh! . . . huh! . . ."

Angel gulped.

"I'll stay with Stevie, Aunt Nuncy," she began heroically. "That is . . ." as Alex gave her an in-

dignant jab in the back, "not, that is, that I couldn't sing the part . . ."

Her tongue stumbled in its eagerness.

Annunziata leaned forward to peer into the flushed face. Nose and lips were quivering and the dark-blue eyes were shining. Throwing back her head, Nuncy laughed and caught Angel by the sleeve.

"Come, my little one. We will find Beniamino. You will help us, Alex?"

Three abreast, they descended upon Benjy. He had just returned from the ticket office, and greeted them with a forced jauntiness which meant that the advance sale was not good. His first concern, on hearing their story, was for Stevie.

"I'll get a doctor, Nuncy!"

Then, attracted by Angel's waiting gaze, he smiled down at her.

"You think you can sing Josephine?"

"As well as I!" cut in Nuncy, with a sweeping gesture toward her own ample bosom. "It is a secret we have been keeping from you."

"Without a rehearsal?" Benjy persisted.

"Without a rehearsal," answered Alex loudly.

Angel squared her shoulders and looked up at him. Her small face was flickering with suppressed excitement. Benjy bent suddenly and kissed her on the wee mole by her mouth.

"Bless you, child! Well, go find Tom and tell him to let you into the costume trunk."

There was so much to do, and no one to help her but Alex! Sadie and Giovanni had gone for one of their walks. Nuncy had time only to sketch through the part for "business." And Dora's baby was on a rampage. Angel and Alex hurried to the theater through the late afternoon from which the sunshine was withdrawing, leaving a wintry dusk.

"Just think," chattered Angel, "some of these very people we're passing will hear me sing to-night."

They found Tom at the theater and with proper enthusiasm he hustled out the Josephine costume. One look was enough, however. Nuncy had a matronly form, and Angel was as slim as a breeze. Even the men could see that the dress was hopeless.

"Never mind," said Angel. "The home trunk's here. And I've a sweet lavender organdie trimmed with big bunches of violets. How *fortunate,* Uncle Tom, Aunt Nuncy's bonnet has violets!" And she swayed across the stage, twining imaginary flowers and warbling:

> "Sorry her lot who loves too well,
> Heavy the heart that hopes but vainly."

Alex promptly began to wring mock tears from his handkerchief.

> "Oh, pity, pity me!
> Our captain's daughter, she,
> And I that lowly suitor."

Tom, not to be outdone, began a breakdown:

"Sing hey, the merry maiden and the tar!"

And presently the three had joined hands and were circling about singing, ". . . hey the merry maiden and the tar!" with such energy that Angel pulled away and said in a whisper: "My voice! My voice! Has Aunt Dora got an iron? I'll go borrow it. Come on, Alex."

As they hurried back to the hotel, Alex began to experience nips of fear. He watched Angel for signs of a similar visitation, but her spirits continued high. Only once, at the door of the hotel, she stopped, put her fingers around her throat and emitted a gush of notes from lower A to top B.

"What is it?" cried Alex. "What made you do that, Angel?"

"I don't know," said Angel, laughing shakily. "I'm not a bit nervous, and my voice is fine."

Benjy and Tim, sitting at poker within, looked at each other queerly.

As it happened, the company was spending the night in this half-grown Ohio town, so Angel and Sadie had taken a room. Angel now had this to herself, and she proceeded with her program of operation. Having pressed her dress she tried it on, inspecting the hang of her skirt from a chair placed in front of the bureau. She brushed her long hair

and studied the effect of braids. She rehearsed her entrances and exits.

"You *must* get some rest," said Alex, popping in on her for the fortieth time in forty minutes.

"Yes, yes, I'll lie down right away. Why, Alex, how *sick* you look! You are positively gray."

Catching a guilty expression on his face, she came closer.

"Alex, are you worried about *me?*"

"Worried for fear you'll carry off all the laurels."

"You *are* worried about me. And you're sweet to take such an interest. But I know the part, Alex. Truly, I do. I've been working on it all winter."

"Sure! You'll get along fine. 'A new star rose in the operatic firmament last evening when Madam Angel Angelo made her first appearance on . . .'"

"Foolish! Run away."

But his red head popped again around her door, and though his face was smiling, his blue eyes looked troubled as he asked:

"Anything Jinny can do?"

"I guess not. Thank her, Alex."

There was much that Jinny could have done, if Angel had been sure the offer was bona fide. Sadie did not return until Angel was finishing her boiled egg and tea, and then she was not particularly helpful.

"I'm so glad, dearest," she said with a kiss. "Be

thankful you're a soprano. Giovanni and I were saying to-day that sopranos get everything."

When the others arrived at the theater, straggling in by twos and threes to inquire for their dressing rooms, Angel was dressed, made up, and ready. Her eyes looked absurdly lavender, like the organdie dress, and the heavy straight black braids were startlingly effective.

"You look darling!" Sadie assured her.

"Do I, really?" asked Angel, returning to the mirror for a final pat of the rabbit's foot.

"Want me to hold your thumbs?" asked Benjy, looking in. Christine Nilsson, he averred, never made an appearance without having her thumbs held, and look where she had got to!

"If you hear me pounding on one note," he told her during the thumb-holding, "it'll be your note. You take it."

"I'll have it already," Angel told him indignantly.

But when she heard him, with his characteristic spirit, pounding out the notes of the introduction, she felt panic and looked about for Alex. He was standing in the wings, ready, from that obscurity, to lend his voice to the opening chorus. Virginie was with him, in her laughable Buttercup make-up, positioned for her entrance.

"How is the idol of the operatic world?" Alex inquired in a loud whisper.

"Never better," Angel whispered back.

" 'What, never?' "

" 'No, never.' "

" 'What, never?' "

" 'Hardly ever.' "

This nonsense made Angel feel better, but Aunt Virginie listened with a fatigued smile.

> "We sail the ocean blue,
> And our saucy ship's a beauty."

The curtain had lifted.

> "I'm called little Buttercup,
> Dear little Buttercup."

A roar of laughter. That meant that Alex, as Dick Deadeye, had lurched into view of the audience. Ralph Rackstraw and Captain Corcoran, in the persons of Tim and Salvatore, were next and smiled encouragement. Then she, herself, as she had done in fun that afternoon, was twining flowers and swaying across the stage.

> "Sorry her lot who loves too well,
> Heavy the heart that hopes but vainly . . ."

She was so happy, now that she was on the stage, now that she felt herself pretty in the lavender dress and heard that her voice was steady—she was so happy that it was hard to seem sad. She could only be demurely pensive.

The audience liked her. During her dialogue with Salvatore she felt sure of that. She felt something warm and friendly flowing to her across the gas flame. And something from her flowed back in response.

Uncle Benjy had told her one time that she sang like a girl from a convent. Well, he could not, she felt certain, say that to-night.

When she had made her exit, she was on tenterhooks to enter again. And when she entered, she entered on air. She and Tim sang, "Refrain, Audacious Tar!" and it went beautifully. And through that dreaded finale of One Act, her thrilling high soprano vindicated its position and she managed dexterously all the tricky words:

"His foot should stamp and his throat should growl,
His hair should twirl and his face should scowl,
His eyes should flash and his breast protrude,
And this should be his customary attitude."

The curtain went down and she was breathless with her achievement. She was also entirely ready for the curtain to lift again.

The second act was even more successful. Happily, she did not know her weaknesses. She did not, for instance, suspect that middle-western "rs" offend the hypercritical. And her audience, fortunately, did not suspect it either. Angel was young and pretty

and her voice, they commented, was high. They were unsparing in applause.

She had heard Uncle Benjy say that Alex clowned too much. Once he had flourished curling-tongs as a pistol, and he was always doing something to send the others off in disastrous mirth. But Alex had not clowned to-night. He had been alert to help her. And when, in the "Carefully on Tiptoe Stealing," he squeaked out, "Silent be, it is the cat!" in a falsetto, Angel's happiness was complete. Alex was afraid for her no longer. She had succeeded.

She was so happy that in the last chorus her voice was laughter in song. She smiled across at Alex and he smiled back at her through the rush of chords that brought down the final curtain.

Sadie fell upon her with kisses, and Aunt Dora and all of them, it seemed, from Uncle Tim to little Raoul who played the Midshipmite. She felt like a bride, bedewed with tears and showered with good wishes.

"Every one's so sweet." She dried her eyes to find herself talking to Aunt Jinny. "Wasn't Aunt Nuncy sweet to give me the chance? And wasn't Uncle Benjy? Weren't they all?"

"Very," agreed Aunt Jinnie.

She stroked Angel's shoulder and gave that lazy laugh which of late had sounded so unfriendly, had made Angel feel so young and ignorant and awkward.

"Very," she repeated. "Singularly so, in fact. But,

you must remember, my dear, that your Dad has been very sweet to them."

"Oh!" cried Angel. "It wasn't that. . . ." And then she stopped with the hot blood flowing into her cheeks. For Aunt Jinnie was sauntering away and Angel realized that she had said it to be cruel. She had wanted Angel to think . . . It wasn't true! It wasn't true! . . . but she had wanted Angel to think that her father's money had bought her this.

"Triumphs in opera! Triumphs in opera!" Alex was mimicking a newsboy's call, and he approached her now, waving an old paper.

Aunt Jinnie was married to Alex. It was because of Alex that Aunt Jinnie hated her. Angel realized, with a downward pitch of the heart, that she mustn't chum with Alex any more.

XXII

JOSEPH ANGEL'S horses knew the way from Cloudman to the farm. Even when, as on this March night, the sky was overcast; when the lantern made but a faint moon of light in a harsh world of damp and windy darkness; when the roads, which were yielding their frost, were rough as unplowed fields, old Bess and Bonnie knew the way. And they took it faithfully. They took it, one might even say, tenderly. They took it as though they understood that their master, slumped in the wagon behind, not heeding them, not guiding them, was drinking his bitter cup.

His horses loved Joseph Angel. His whole world loved him. His neighbors, his brother-in-law, David John, his stout and red-faced Betsy, all the black-haired children whose music had spilled from that farm cottage, even Joe Joe loved him. Even, he admitted now in agony of soul, Joe Joe loved him—his son to whose life he had done this dreadful thing, acting the part of a cyclone that twists a beautiful tree into a hideous shape unintended by God. It was strange, he cried out to himself, that a man whom every one loved could do a thing like that! Not knowing it!

But hadn't he known? Tearing at his heart for secrets too long hidden, he whispered that he had. There had been a rock locked away in his breast, locked away inside this man of kindliness and gentle humor. And the rock had been that plan for Joe Joe's life, that relentless fixed determination.

It hadn't been a rock at first, of course. He looked back now on its inception. It had come as blessed healing after that shattering of all his hopes which had followed his giving up his money to his father. He had thought his life was ended when he relinquished that pouchful of money. He had married Betsy; he had taken over the farm. Still his life had lain about him like broken glass. Then he had heard that a child was coming, and his life was mended. His son should be a doctor!

"That I, of all fathers, after what my father had done to me. . . ." But he saw with ironic clearness that men do not learn, not even by their cruelest lessons. The same old comedies, the same old tragedies are played out again and again on this earth—no changes but the changes in cast—and all because men do not learn. He who had suffered so much had not learned.

He had made that plan for Joe Joe and had held it against the world. That was why it had turned to rock in his breast. Joe Joe had loved to sing, to clog, to play the piano and organ; no matter, he should be a doctor. Joe Joe had been poor at his studies; no

matter, he should be a doctor. Joe Joe had failed at the university; no matter, he should be a doctor. He should be a doctor! Joseph had shouted to the sky, and had closed his eyes to what eventuated.

For Joe Joe had not even held his position as drug-clerk. And when he returned to the farm, ostensibly to help his father, Joseph had whispered to Betsy, "Now he will come around!" And when Joe Joe grew so blackly despondent that it seemed his head was wrapped in thunder-clouds, when the younger children scuttled off at his approach and he threw out words as a miser throws down money, when he had changed like that, Joseph had whispered to Betsy, "He is regretting his lost opportunities. He will ask for another chance, soon." And when he had taken to going to town, staying for two or three days and coming back with a colorless swollen face and a blacker mood than ever . . . ah, that, Joseph had ignored.

He had ignored, too, the rumor linking Joe Joe with the Hanson girl. Betsy had told him what people were saying, but he had pooh-poohed her. Why, the Angels were old settlers and highly respected in Cloudman. Their friends were of the best. Hadn't Joe Joe gone with the best in high school?

Then to-night, Joseph had gone into Cloudman to take a cow to market and to pass an hour or so with David John. David was lonely since Angel went away, and ailing, too, though he wouldn't let Angel

know it. Joseph had gone in to Cloudman and in passing The Corner Café had heard a voice.

It had rolled through the swinging doors, melodious, free. Joseph knew little of voices, and he had not heard this one for months, but there was something familiar about it. He had turned and pushed inside. And it was as if some one had thrown a knife to pierce his heart as he entered. For, lolling against the bar, his foot on the rail, his collar off and a paper rose pinned to his coat was Joe Joe. Joe Joe was singing, and his big black eyes were unnaturally shining and bright:

> "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,
> I feed my horse on corn and beans,
> And often live beyond my means,
> Though a captain in the army!"

He had left the rail now. He was circling about on an imaginary horse. He gave it great slaps on the rump, clung to its mane, affected to keep his seat with difficulty.

> "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,
> I feed my horse on corn and beans . . ."

Joseph sank down at a nearby table, beads of cold sweat coming out on his forehead.

"And he's mum and glum as a clam when he's sober." The other occupant of the table, applauding,

leaned toward Joseph. "We like to get him liquored up to hear him sing."

"Does he do it often?"

"Oh, whenever he comes to town. He's a farmer lad."

Joe Joe prepared to repeat the chorus. His face, as he waited for the roar of applause to subside, shone with pleased excitement. The look of it took Joseph back many years, to the days when Joe Joe was a little boy in pinafores and his uncles and aunts had placed him on the kitchen table to sing. That same look of innocent pleased excitement . . . Joseph stumbled out of doors.

Somehow, he got to the wagon, and now, jogging through the blustery cold March night, his head flung down in his hands and Bess and Bonnie finding their way, he wrung the truth from his soul. He had done to his son what his father had done to him. And his son was weaker than he had been. And so the disaster was greater.

"But, thank God, he's only twenty. Thank God, he's only twenty. It isn't too late yet."

He saw then that he must send Joe Joe away. He must send him away to do what he could for himself. And painful as this decision was, it helped him to make it. It put new heart in him. He straightened up in his seat, and the horses sensed his freshened courage and picked up their hoofs. Through the rest of the ride and while he unharnessed and climbed into

bed beside Betsy, he kept saying to himself, "Thank God, he's only twenty." For the picture of Joe Joe turning a new leaf, making a fresh start and beginning all over again, that helped to drive from his mind the picture of Joe Joe singing drunkenly in The Corner Café.

Joe Joe didn't come home next day. And much as Joseph wanted to communicate his resolve he thought it better not to go in town for the boy. When Joe Joe came home, the following morning, fiercely morose of mood, it was harder than Joseph had thought it would be to be open a conversation. At length, however, he saw his son striding toward the old hotel. That ruined pile, focus of Benjy's dreams, was a favorite haunt of Joe Joe's. His father hurried after him, but before he overtook him a light trill arrested them both.

An open buggy had driven into the yard. Joseph did not recognize the horse. Neither, from that distance, did he recognize the girl, although Joe Joe crossed to her at once. Joseph watched them talking and was pleased that she had come. He turned toward the house, meaning to ask Betsy to invite the young lady to dinner. As he drew nearer, however, he recognized Hilma Hanson.

He bowed to her stiffly. It was wrong of Joe Joe, he thought, resentful in spite of his compassion, to bring such a girl to his home. He was passing rapidly when she called out to him.

"Oh, Mr. Angel!"

He halted and she leaned toward him from the buggy. She had frizzled yellow hair, which bushed out beneath a cheap pink bonnet. Her pale-blue eyes protruded slightly from a pink and vacuous face.

"What do you mean," she questioned coquettishly, "by keeping Joey out here all the time?"

"Joe is free to go to town whenever he pleases, Miss Hanson."

Hilma laughed. She had a high, tinny laugh.

"Now, don't say that, Mr. Angel. You're giving him away. Joey says it's work that's been making him neglect me. And he's been neglecting me something awful."

Joseph looked at his son. The boy stared down at the muddy wheel, unsmiling, making no attempt to respond to her jocularity.

"Have you told your Pa, Joey?"

"No."

"Let's tell him, shall we?" There was a peculiar urgency in her tone.

Joe Joe's neck snapped back abruptly. He looked at his father, swallowed with difficulty, and said:

"Hilma and I are going to be married."

The girl gave her tinny laugh again.

"There! What kind of a daughter-in-law do you guess I'll make, Mr. Angel? Don't be bashful, Joey. Look at him blush!" For, indeed, a slow dark tide

of color was mounting to Joe Joe's face. His gaze dropped again to the muddy wheel.

When Joseph with some words—he hardly knew what they were—had extricated himself, he returned to the old hotel. And Joe Joe would marry a girl like that! He had driven Joe Joe to that! There was a God in Heaven, kinder than he deserved, who had brought him back to his senses in time, Joseph thought. He tramped back and forth across the echoing room, stopping now and then to crush some fallen plaster to powder. It seemed a dragging age until the girl drove out of the yard. Then he went to the doorway and called his son.

Joe Joe came slowly across the soggy barnyard. There was none of that fierce moroseness about him now. He looked worn and beaten. When he had crossed the threshold, Joseph began to talk, swiftly, with his hand on the young shoulder.

"Joe Joe! We'll not speak of that marriage. I drove you into the thought of it. I know I did. And I've had my eyes opened. I see how wrong I've been. Joe Joe, I've wanted to tell you for two days that I see how wrong I've been."

"What do you mean, Pa?"

"I mean you can do what you like, live your own life. You can go with your Uncle Benjy, if you wish, or perhaps some place to study . . ."

"You mean—I can go with the troupe?"

"Yes, Joe Joe, lad."

Joe Joe turned his head slowly, as one who is dazed. But none of the expected radiance flowed into his face. After the bewilderment came unbelief, and then a white and wild despair.

"Father!" He broke into great wrenched sobs and, turning, buried his head in his arm against the wall.

Tears came into Joseph's eyes.

"Son, son! I'm so sorry." But still those sobs tore through the empty, dusty room.

"Why, you're just a lad, yet. Not yet twenty. There's plenty of time."

"No! No! It's too late."

And then he drew a long breath and was still, his wet face buried in his arm.

Joseph touched him yearningly.

"What do you mean, Joe Joe? If you have debts, I'll pay them. They're all my fault. I've been terribly to blame."

"I can't go! I can't go!" He did not lift his head from his arm.

"What do you mean? Tell me, son."

"I've got to marry that girl."

"You've got . . ." But the words died on Joseph Angel's lips. Words! What were words? Nothing came to him to say in that blasting moment of comprehension. But he put his arm around Joe Joe's shoulder. It came to him to do that. And afterward, it gave him a small comfort to remember that Joe Joe had not drawn away.

XXIII

RECOGNITION of the fact that Angel was avoiding him broke over Alex in a clap of fury.

He had the lively temper that is commonly associated with plumage the tint of his—a fire-cracker temper which exploded harmlessly and left him, within five minutes, as radiantly good-humored as before. Nothing that had hitherto happened in the troupe, few things that had happened in his one and twenty years of life, had stirred him to anything fiercer than that fire-cracker explosion. But this was different.

He had not immediately seen what was occurring. He was so happy over her success, which had been repeated twice before Nuncy returned to the cast. He was so happy by nature, the most buoyant soul in all that company of buoyant souls, that he took continued happiness for granted. But he realized within a day or two that something was happening to mar it.

For he never had Angel any more; never for a moment. She melted away at his approach like a snowball. She dodged him as if they were playing Blind Man's Buff. And when he actually arrested

her and held her talking to him, her eyes were searching all the time for a pretext for escape.

The slim little figure in the astrakhan cap and jacket, with black hair blowing into jewel-like blue eyes clung to Benjy; it romped with Violetta and the children; it intruded on Sadie and Giovanni; but it was not for him.

He knew without being told—as Angel had known when Jinnie had been cruel to her—where the trouble lay. But he made no attempt to judge of rightness or wrongness. He was simply blindly angry. He was so angry that it seemed to Angel, watching him from afar—tears close to her eyes, for she missed him achingly—it seemed to Angel that his red head was a pillar of wrathful fire.

Once when she was backing away from him, in a hotel parlor where he had surprised her, he caught in her eyes a look of wild panic. That look pierced his heart with such acuteness that he halted, turned and stamped away. But his fury had only burned the brighter.

He was not angry at Jinnie. He did not give Jinnie one thought in a week of desperate thinking. He only wished she would not fuss at him so much, try so beastly hard to make him comfortable. Why should he be comfortable when Angel, cut off by her own hand from his protecting care, had taken cold? Why should he be comfortable when Angel, silly little idiot, had acquired a great croupy cough?

Alex heard the cough in the car at night. He heard it down hotel corridors. He heard it from her dressing room. He heard it, most intolerably, stifled on the stage. And every time he heard it, it tingled through his body along some tortured nerve. Alex followed that cold every sickish step of the way. He knew from her slight shiver in the wings when she felt the first touch of fever. He knew from the absence of her voice in the chorus when the cough tightened in her chest. The night she danced with moving voiceless lips and a fixed difficult smile, he glared at her as might a heartless stage director.

Those were not days when the importunities of illness were lightly yielded to. The troupe had put on "Pinafore" with every member of the cast dog-sick from bad water. Jenny Lind had sung the dainty Josephine with her face distorted by mumps. The uncles and aunts were sympathetic; they dosed Angel and bundled her up. But no one suggested, as Alex thought they should, hurrying her to bed and sending for the doctor.

Then came a night, in a Michigan hamlet, when they were locked out of the railroad station. The railroads of the 'eighties took no such indulgent care of their public as they take to-day. The station agent departed with a lantern, saying that their freight train would be along soon. The children, who had been sleeping on the benches in the waiting room, were carried to a truck in the lee of the building.

The women shivered beside them and the men paced up and down in a thin whistling wind, laden with snow.

Alex paced, cursing. He cursed so volubly that Benjy, once or twice, looked at him in mild reproof. Now and then he stalked to where Angel and Violetta were wrapped in each other's arms on the edge of the truck, and when he returned he cursed harder than ever.

At last the freight edged in, and the little troupe climbed gratefully into the fire-lit comfort of the caboose. Angel promptly developed chills and fever. She developed them so rapidly that when they moved her to the main-line train she was flighty and thought that Nuncy was Mrs. Tinkcom. The show was given in Detroit without her.

Next day the inexorable law of the road compelled the troupe to move on. Her fever had subsided, but the weather was still severe, and it seemed unwise to move her. The hotel at which they were stopping was warm and comfortable; the management was kindly; Angel had plenty of money, and to the Angelos the situation did not seem tragic.

"She'll be joining us soon, probably when we come through from Port Huron," Benjy said reassuringly.

Alex strove to seem gruffly casual.

"Who'll you leave with her?"

"Who the dickens can we spare?" Benjy's troubled gaze roved over his depleted flock. It lit on thirteen-year-old Violetta. "Lady Macbeth, here, will stay with her. Won't you, Madam?"

"Oh, yes," chirruped Violetta.

"Why, she's just a child," expostulated Alex. "She hasn't any judgment. She . . ."

"Oh, hasn't she!" said Violetta sticking out her tongue and then, remembering her dignity as an interpreter of the great Shakespeare, she quoted loftily: " ' 'Tis but a peevish boy.' "

Violetta would be quite satisfactory, the others concluded, ignoring Alex's fuming. So the troupe moved on, leaving a Violetta mantled in importance and an Angel who faintly assured them that they were not to think of worrying.

Farther, farther, farther away; farther, farther, farther away; farther, farther, farther away; the wheels of the train reminded Alex. He sat on the aisle, huddling his six feet and two inches abjectly. Virginie looked out of the window.

"It's queer, Alex, that you should mind so," she said at length, turning. "You're the only one in the troupe, almost, who isn't related to Angel."

"Why, I've known Angel since she was a little girl. She's an old friend . . ."

"A very *dear* friend, I know," Virginie cut in sweetly.

"That's quite true." Alex stiffened.

"Yes, yes, of course it's true," said Jinnie with her lazy laugh.

Something in her laugh sent Alex ahead to the smoker. It reminded him that he might protect Angel in other ways than wrapping her in scarfs. He made a mighty effort to fight down his misery, to appear his usual carefree self. He joined the men at poker and gambled desperately.

But it was apparent to all that he stumbled through his part more carelessly with each succeeding night. He sang badly, he missed cues and there was no spirit in his acting.

Virginie reproved him for a flagrant lapse and he flashed out at her.

"Oh, leave me alone, you fussy old . . ." The last word was swallowed, but a delicate pink came into Virginie's cheeks.

Alex was instantly ashamed. Even when he had irritated her with his tomfoolery or some extravagance, irritated her to the point of a sharp speech, he had never spoken sharply in reply. But his apologetic hand was drawn to her cheek. "Alex . . . you haven't kissed me . . . for ever so long." And he pulled away. It wasn't his fault, was it, that that madness was gone? He wasn't going to simulate it now!

They had been away from Detroit for two days when he capitulated to his anxiety. He sent Violetta

a telegram. And coming out of the office, he met Virginie, sauntering slowly along the walk. It was one of those March days that form the squalid chrysalis from which the northern spring so radiantly emerges. It was not a day to invite a stroll. When she smiled inquiringly at the doorway he had quitted, Alex was instantly and defiantly suspicious.

"I know a man in there," he said.

"Oh, do you?" Virginie returned conversationally. "How pleasant . . . so far from home! Don't you want passes for him?"

"Well, if I do, I can ask Benjy myself."

Instantly, again, he was ashamed. What had got into him, that he snapped her up on every remark! It was, he knew, this torment that possessed him; this torment that was keeping him from sleeping, from thinking rationally, from doing his work; this torment that seemed to his agitated fancy like a great burning hand, pressed against the back of his head, pushing him wherever it willed. But he couldn't tell that to Virginie.

More gently, however, he asked her how the advance sale had gone.

"Very badly. Benjy says he doesn't think we'll play to thirty dollars. But he doesn't seem to be worried. He and Tom have picked up a friend, a big burly man in a coon coat with diamonds up his front. They're talking him to death."

She chatted on in her low agreeable voice,

presenting the gossip of the morning, but Alex's thoughts had returned to his telegram. How soon could he expect an answer? What should he do if Angel were no better?

As the day progressed without word, despair grew upon him. Among all the multitude of Deadeyes, tall and short, fat and thin, who have foiled the plans of ill-matched lovers, it is doubtful if there has ever been a worse one than Alex was that night.

Otherwise, the performance went off with spirit, with remarkable spirit considering that there was hardly a baker's dozen in the house. The big man in the coon coat was there. And Benjy, pounding out the accompaniment, lifted a beaming and inspirational face. None of the prevailing cheer communicated itself to Alex, however. He was walled in with foreboding. And when, leaving the stage after the first act, he found Virginie with a telegram in her hand, he felt these forebodings realized.

He hesitated for a moment upon accepting it, but as she waited expectantly he tore it open.

"Anything important, dear?"

"No, nothing . . . that is, very . . . I'll have to see Benjy."

He bolted from her, and now that burning hand of torment pushed him furiously ahead; for the message—damn Violetta and her Shakespeare!—was urgent.

" 'Fair sir, I pity her . . .' " she had quoted mad-

deningly and then, more plainly, had added in her own words: "She is really much worse."

Churned up from his anxieties was a dim apprehension that his situation was awkward. Benjy might, with reason, wonder why Violetta hadn't wired to him. Alex was, he realized, almost the only one in the lot of them unrelated to Angel. A week ago this would not have deterred him, but the warning in Jinnie's laugh had lingered. He was married, there was no denying that. The linking of his name with Angel's would cause talk. And the talk, by some damned bias of convention, would do no harm to him, the guilty one, but would smirch his shining Angel.

Why, then, he argued as he ran, tell Benjy the truth? What was to be gained? Benjy would not, he knew, return himself. Neither would he spare another of the troupe. He would send money, if he had it, and he would telegraph Angel's father. That was all. Well, he, Alex, had money. His reckless flings at poker had fortuitously filled his pocket. And he could wire David as well as Benjy could.

"There's nothing to be gained by telling the truth," he decided, and on the instant of speaking to Benjy the words of his deception came.

"Sorry, Benjy. I know you need me like the devil. But I just had a wire. My mother's very low and she wants me to come at once."

Benjy was impetuously compassionate.

"Alex! I'm sorry, boy. That's hard news to get when you're so far from home."

"I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid I'll leave you in an awful hole."

"Crogan knows your part. Don't think of us. We'll get along all right. Got plenty of money?"

"Plenty."

Alex lingered, not holding out his hand. Benjy misunderstood this reluctance and touched the boy on the shoulder comfortingly.

"She'll pick up before you get there. I've often known it to happen. Man called out on a message like this, and the party sitting up and eating when he arrived. It's a fact."

"Yes. Thank you." Alex dragged away.

"Oh, Alex," called Benjy, "will you change trains in Detroit?"

"I suppose I will."

"Well, if you have any time on your hands, run out and look at Angel, will you? And if she isn't doing tip-top, wire her father. David's pretty precious of that little black puss . . ."

"I will, Benjy. I'll make it a point."

Virginie, too, greeted his news with an unbearable kindness.

"I'm so terribly sorry, dear. I wish Benjy could spare me. I'd go with you."

"Why the deuce should *you* go?" he asked with leaping irritability.

But he could not ruffle her.

"Maybe it would help, dear, to have some one to talk to. The trip will be very hard, alone."

"Thank you, Jinnie, for suggesting it, but I'd rather not."

"Have you money enough?"

"Plenty."

The call sounded for Act Two, but she paused.

"You'll be going through Detroit?"

"Benjy wants me to stop off and look at Angel."

"Oh . . . does he?" she answered.

And then she hurried off and Alex dropped his head in his arms. A shamed, guilty, miserable head. And Angel, perhaps before he got there . . . God!

XXIV

ALEX arrived in Detroit at that early hour of the morning when the streets of a city are so pleasantly empty and clean. The mud of the day before had dried in a fresh breeze which also was brushing the dingy clouds from the sky, leaving a wide strip of brilliant blue as happy with promise as the rainbow.

He paused for a moment at the street door of the station, gratefully. The dim rocking lamps of the day-coach and the snores of his fellow travelers, the lonesome lights peering at intervals from unseen farmhouses and the menacing murmur of the wheels, the fantastic swinging lanterns and sharp cries in the stations at which they had stopped: these had woven into a tissue of horror which broke now as he breathed in the fresh morning air.

But that burning hand at the back of his head did not relax. Not for a moment. It gripped him with renewed violence as he struck off in the direction of Angel's hotel. Ashamed of the pace he was taking, he jerked to a stop and read the advertisement of a Shakespearean Repertoire company upon a billboard. He made no sense of it, however, and in a moment was rushing on at the same breakneck speed.

Arriving at the hotel, he asked for Violetta, who came running down with an air of great efficiency.

"I'm sorry I worried you, Alex," she said in a grown-up tone. "She's very much better this morning."

"How much better? Out of danger?"

"She's sitting up. I just finished dressing her.

"She can't imagine why you came," Violetta continued over her shoulder as he followed her up the shallow stairs. "She told me, when you telegraphed, to answer that she was doing well, and I haven't told her that I didn't. But she *wasn't* doing well. And I was worried."

"Never mind," said Alex shortly. "I'm glad you wired as you did."

He pushed after her down the hall and into Angel's room. It was a front room, facing east, with a view out over the city and a glimpse of the water. When he entered behind Violetta it was full of sunshine, lying in long banners on the floor. It was so sweet and Angel was so sweet, sitting there in a rocking chair with her little feet on a stool, that it seemed to him as if that burning hand must loosen. But it didn't.

Violetta bridged his coming with a flow of words.

"My mother is sick," Alex supplemented, "and I have to go back to Cloudman. Benjy asked me to stop off and have a look at you."

His eyes were devouring her, and he saw that she

was glad to see him. Yet he found a bird-in-a-net look, too.

She wore a little dressing-sacque of figured red silk over a billowing black satin skirt. Her feet in tiny French-heeled slippers were folded on the stool. Her black hair was wound in great braids about her head.

"How long are you going to stay?" Violetta was demanding.

"Until to-night."

"Well, now, that's fortunate." She nodded briskly at Angel. "That's *very* fortunate. I can help those people out."

"What people?" asked Alex, staring at Angel.

"There's a troupe of Shakespearean players in town. They're stopping at this hotel. I got to talking with them and they've been up to see Angel and been ever so kind. They need a supe . . . supernumerary, and they'd think they were lucky to get a professional like me. I was just talking to Angel about it when you came. She said she could spare me and I didn't want to leave her, but now that you're here . . ."

"Oh, go!" cried Alex. "Go by all means. It's . . . it's fine experience, I should say."

"They're having a rehearsal this morning?" said Violetta anxiously.

"That's all right."

"And a matinée and an evening show?"

"That's quite all right."

"Oh, goodie! goodie!" Violetta caught Angel in rapture. "I'll get ready right away."

Through her multitude of small preparations, Alex walked restlessly up and down the room. The sweetness of Angel, sitting there in that little rocker! The sweetness of her, smiling at him, with that terror hidden in her eyes! And why wasn't he happy? Even with her getting better, even with Violetta going and leaving them alone for a blessed day . . .

"Well, good-bye, darling. Sure there's nothing I can do for you? Alex will be a fine nurse, I know. Big clumsy boy!" This was a return fling, he recognized, and grinned at her. "They're playing 'Julius Cæsar' to-day and I'll be a Roman woman. No, not child—*woman.*" She waved her way out of the room.

When she was gone, Angel began talking. She rather forced herself to talk, Alex thought, marching back and forth in front of her, his arms across his chest.

"Your mother is sick! Is she very sick, Alex?"

He pulled up before her chair.

"She isn't sick at all!"

"She isn't sick! But you said . . ."

"I lied."

"You lied . . ."

"Yes. About my mother." He started walking again, furiously. "I lied about my mother who is . . . holy to me. I told Benjy she was dying; let him

think she had a last message to give. That's the sort I am! Nothing good in me. I'm bad clear through.

"I lied to Virginie," he rushed on, as Angel sat very still in the little rocker. "I lied to everybody. I left Benjy in such a hole that I'm afraid it'll send the company on the rocks. That's how bad I am. I'm running the risk of their finding out, of it hurting you. I've hurt you already. I've fallen in love with you and it's all bad, dishonorable, nasty. . . ."

His voice broke. He went to the wall and banged his head against it, hid his head in a despairing arm.

"Alex," said Angel. "Come here."

He threw himself on the floor beside her, flung his head against her knees.

"I'm all bad, bad, bad! I bring nothing but harm to you. My loving you is wrong. Everything I do is wrong."

"Alex," said Angel. "Hush!" She put her head down on his hair and for a moment held him fast, her black braids pressed against the tousled red thatch. Then she drew his head up to her breast.

"Alex," she said softly.

"Yes, Angel."

"I say it's not wrong. Does that make you feel better? It's not wrong, your coming to me."

He lifted his head and looked at her.

Angel went on steadily.

"You love me, and I love you. And you're married.

That means that we have to separate. And I won't go back to the troupe. I'll go . . . I'll go to Cloudman. But could we separate, Alex, without telling each other? Without talking it out? Of course, of course we couldn't! I don't care who you lied to. I don't care who you disappointed. You did right in coming."

With a long shaky sigh, Alex took his eyes from her face, dropped his head again into her lap. Angel held it closely in her hands and that other hand, that great tormenting pressure, dropped away. For a long time they sat so, and then he straightened himself and leaned against her knee and drew her hand around his shoulder where he could hold the fingers.

"Angel! You love me?"

"That's what I said."

"Angel! How long have you loved me?"

"Oh, ever so long."

"Not so long as I've loved you."

"Did you love me the day we prayed the grasshoppers away?"

"You didn't!"

"I planned my wedding dress all through the sermon, after seeing just the back of your head."

They laughed then, Alex with the tear stains on his cheeks. He turned about, still sitting on the floor, and held her hands in his.

"You're making it up. You never loved me all that time."

"Didn't I! Didn't I carry around in a pill box the end of my hair that you'd pulled?"

"Why, the deuce," he cried, jumping to his feet, "didn't you tell a fellow?"

It was all so delightful that they returned reluctantly to the infelicities of the present.

"I'll leave the troupe, Alex," Angel said, when they were talking soberly again, his chair drawn close so that he could hold her hands, bending now and then to kiss them.

"No," said Alex, "there's no use your doing that."

He pressed the little palms together, a worried frown perching on his brows.

"You see, Angel, I won't go on living with Virginie."

"Why, Alex . . . she's your wife."

"I suppose she is. But I won't. I just can't do it."

"You lived with her . . . till I came," said Angel, tears starting.

"Don't cry, my sweetest!" He wiped the tears awkwardly away. "Listen to me. Listen to me hard and try to understand.

"At the very first . . . I was just insane. I won't try to explain that. It was over long before you came. When you came, she had become . . . just some one in the background, like a grandmother. I wasn't happy; I wasn't unhappy. I tried to remember to carry her bags, and not to whistle when she had a

headache, for she was very kind to me. I was living for my work and for something . . . I don't know just what . . . in the future."

He pressed the little palms harder.

"And then you came. And I guess I knew right then what it was I had been living for. I wouldn't admit to myself that I had fallen in love with you, for I knew that it was wrong—on your account; because it would do you harm, not because of her. She had simply vanished out of my life. I didn't hate her. I just didn't think of her. It was as if she had stopped living."

He stood up.

"I couldn't go back to her, Angel. I couldn't! I'm going away somewhere, I don't know where, and never see her again."

"But Alex, she's your wife! She . . ."

And as Angel hesitated, still unconvinced, he dropped beside her.

"You remember that something, deep inside you, told you it was right for me to come here?"

Angel nodded.

"Well, something just like that tells me it's right for me to leave her. If she's sick, if she needs money, of course I'll help her. But only wrong would come if I went back feeling the way I do."

So they put that aside and turned to the enjoyment of their day, their single day, their blessed day together. Violetta bounded in at times with vivacious

accounts of her adventures and in her presence they attempted a casual manner, but achieved it with difficulty. Alone, they talked, Alex sitting beside her and stroking her hand. He fed her her meals, bit by bit, from a spoon. He brushed and braided her hair. Sometimes, in a gush of passion, he caught her to his breast and kissed her. But not often—he didn't dare. Mostly they talked.

"So you can go back to the troupe, Angel."

"It will be so lonesome without you."

"You'll be doing work you love. You must work hard, too, so that you'll get famous and I can find my news of you in the daily papers."

They laughed at that.

"And you," said Angel, "what will you do, Alex?"

"I don't know," he said dejectedly. "It doesn't matter."

"Oh, Alex, it will matter to me. Every moment! Every moment of the day."

"For a week or so."

"For years and years. Forever!" She tried to make some picture of those years.

"From seventeen to seventy, I suppose."

She was crying again.

"Sweetheart, I didn't mean it. I know you love me. There! Cheer up! Only, when the devil *are* we to see each other again?"

"Some . . . time," said Angel chokily.

After the tears were dried she told him: "You

must have a great career, too. Promise me you will. You'll keep on singing?"

"Sure! I can get a job with a dozen troupes."

"I'm sure you can. Where are you going to from here?"

"Somewhere. Not to Cloudman."

He was, he told her, going to write to Benjy, going to make a clean breast of things, if she didn't mind. Benjy'd been so decent. Then he'd make a new start somewhere, anywhere . . . it didn't matter . . .

That brought the bitterness back into his voice, and Angel coaxed it out again; and he took her into his arms for one of those precious moments, and broke away and lit the gas. He brought up her supper, and Violetta was in and out, and presently the winter evening was upon them.

He must go that night, he insisted. He didn't care when or on what train. He didn't want Violetta to suspect. He did not want one breath of talk to follow Angel back. But he could stay until Violetta returned, so they began to plot future consolations. At every hour of the day he would know what she was doing and he could think of her.

"At seven you'll always be going to the theater."

"At eight-thirty you'll be doing that cunning little dance. Oh, Angel! I wish I could see you do it again."

"What minute will you promise always to think of me, always, without fail?"

They settled on eleven-thirty in the morning.

"No, make it eleven thirty-three," Alex insisted. "An odd time like that will be easier to remember. I don't want you ever to forget."

He cut off the ends of her black hair and, delightedly, they found a pill box.

"Just like the old one, only that was blue."

"I'll be blue enough to color this one," said Alex, making his joke, though he felt himself upon the gallows.

Angel wanted a lock of his hair to put in a ring.

"But my hair's so darn conspicuous," he protested. "And every one knows your father's hair is black. What'll they think?"

"Alex, you sit down!"

"All right, shear away!"

And as she put the scissors to his hair, pausing before cutting to rest her cheek against it for a moment, a sharp rap sounded at the door. Alex jumped up. Angel slid her hand in his.

"Who is it?" she called.

"A lady to see you, miss."

XXV

ALEX whispered:

"If it should be Virginie, I hate to have her find me here and Violetta gone."

"How could it be Virginie?"

"I don't know . . . unless she didn't believe me."

"Anyhow, what does it matter?"

"It matters. You don't understand. But she's jealous. She might say anything."

"We haven't done anything wrong," said Angel, stiffening.

"I know it, but I won't have her find me just the same. Ask the boy where she is."

"Is she downstairs?" queried Angel in a lifted voice.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Tell her to come up," Alex whispered.

"Tell her to come up," repeated Angel.

And as the boy's steps died away, Alex reached for his hat, overcoat and grip. He put them down, put out his arms to Angel.

Angel kissed him. But a kiss is so soon ended! She kissed him again with a rising sob and a tightening of her arms. He put her gently from him.

"Lower the gas, dear. Then she can't tell you've

been crying. You'd better give your hair a touch, too. I'll go down the hall and watch for a chance to slip by. Be sure to close your door after she comes in."

He kissed her again, a short, agonized kiss. He gathered up his things once more. He was gone.

Driven by his urgency, Angel lowered the gas, splashed water over her face, loosened her tumbled braids and let them fall about her shoulders. She was in her rocking chair, with her feet up on the stool, when the door which Alex had closed opened again.

"Aunt Virginie!"

"Aunt Virginie," repeated the other. She came forward and kissed Angel lightly on the cheek. Glancing about the room with hard, bright alertness, she inquired: "Alex gone?"

"I'm sorry. He's just gone."

"I thought I might catch him," said Virginie easily. She laid off her dolman and, approaching the mirror, adjusted her bonnet. Her tall slender figure was extremely trig. She looked, Angel thought, like the beautiful Princess of Wales, and was quite as stately and calm.

Angel, herself, was quivering inside. It was strange to her that her hands lay quiet and that her voice, when she spoke, sounded steady.

"How did you happen to come, Aunt Virginie?"

"Company's broken up. It was crumbling when Alex left, but Benjy didn't tell him for fear of trou-

bling him further. You see, Benjy didn't know then what we were all going to do. But it seems we've found a savior."

"A savior?"

"I'll tell you about him later. I hurried on in the hope of finding Alex. And I told the others that if he had gone I'd look after you and Violetta. How are you feeling?"

"Much better. I'm really well now."

She heard his step, passing the closed door. He was going, going, out of her life—Angel's fingers closed on the arms of her rocker.

"I'm sorry I missed Alex." Jinnie drew up a chair. "They told me in the office they thought he was still here."

"He went just before you came. You might have met him."

"He wasn't registered."

"He knew he was leaving this evening."

The footsteps had reached the stairs. She could hear them descending. When, oh, dear God! would she see him again? When?

"Violetta around?"

"She's supeing at the theater."

"I saw they were giving some Shakespeare."

Angel's head fell back. Her hands gripped the chair arms so desperately, her body was so rigid and her face so white that Virginie sprang up.

"Angel! You are sick!"

Angel did not answer.

"Here! Take my smelling salts."

Angel threw the tiny bottle across the room.

"I'm not sick. It's Alex! He's gone."

"Yes, yes. You told me that."

"He was here, in the room, when you came," cried Angel. "He wanted to go out quietly, though we hadn't done anything wrong. He thought you might think we had—being alone here together."

Jinnie did not speak, but her face paled, and she came closer.

"I can't stand it!" sobbed Angel. "I can't stand it, Aunt Jinnie. I've got to tell you. I want everything straight. I love Alex. I loved him long before you did. I've loved him since I was a little girl. I can hardly remember when I didn't love him."

She was weeping now and Jinnie, still without speaking, sat down again in the chair opposite Angel. Angel sobbed on wildly.

"I never thought I'd love a man who was married. But he *wasn't* married, don't you see? And when I found he was, I thought of course I'd stop. But I didn't. I love him so much it just tears through my body. I love him so much I could scream it aloud. I love him so much I would throw myself out of that window if I thought I should never see him again."

"I understand," said Jinnie.

"And Alex," sobbed Angel, "loves me too. He

didn't know it until I got sick. But he wants me so, needs me so. He's just a child, Aunt Jinnie. Just a little boy."

"Just," agreed Jinnie, wincing, "a little boy."

Angel didn't even hear her.

"You knew he loved me. Didn't you? We thought maybe you did. Oh, I've been so afraid it was making you unhappy! And Alex, he thinks you're wonderful, Aunt Jinnie. He says you've been so kind to him. But people can't help loving. They just . . . can't help . . . loving."

"Trite," said Jinnie, "but true."

She stood up and walked slowly across the room. She paused at the bureau, picked up and dropped the toilet things, touched with a painful smile the thick lock of dark-red hair.

"Angel," she said briskly, without turning, "I suspected all this. I came, partly to ask you a question. What do you and Alex intend to do?"

"To do?"

"Yes. What are you planning to do? Things can't go on as they are."

That was sensible. How good, after all, it was to talk to Jinnie! Angel felt cleansed and invigorated. She straightened in her chair.

"We've made plans, Aunt Jinnie. I thought at first that I'd go back to Cloudman. But Alex said that wouldn't help, that wouldn't do any good, for he, even if I went, he . . ."

"He wouldn't live with me," said Jinnie, matter-of-factly.

"Yes. He wouldn't live with you. And so he is going away, way away somewhere. I felt," said Angel, "badly about that. It was me coming in between you two and breaking up your marriage. But Alex said the Lord Himself, if He could see into his heart, would tell him to go away."

"So that," said Jinnie, "was the plan."

"Yes," said Angel. "That was the plan." She regarded Jinnie's back with anxious, jewel-like eyes.

Jinnie returned from the bureau, reseated herself in the chair and leaned forward.

"Pray for me, Angel!" she said abruptly.

Angel started.

"Pray for you, Aunt Jinnie?"

"Yes, pray for me," said Jinnie. Her delicate lips pressed together and her slender throat tightened. "I want strength," she said, "for an act of ordinary decency. It's strange, isn't it, to have to ask prayers for that?"

A smile flashed over her face, making it, momentarily, the face that Steve Angel had seen beneath a parasol.

"I give you Alex," she said. "I mean, I'll give him legally. I'll divorce him, Angel." Angel stared whitely.

"I'll divorce him," said Jinnie, "quickly. You must

marry, have children, be happy together. La, I've done it. It's over. That wasn't so bad."

"But Aunt Jinnie!" cried Angel, starting up. "He's gone!"

"Only to Cloudman."

"No . . . no. It was a lie about his mother. I forgot to tell you that. He went out, down the hall, now, while we were talking . . ."

"Where?"

"I don't know where!" cried Angel.

She jumped up and ran to the door, ran back again. She caught Virginie in her arms, naturally, as she might her mother. She pressed her black head into Virginie's bosom.

"I don't know where. I don't know where," she sobbed.

XXVI

THE man in the coon coat, with, as Jinnie expressed it, diamonds up his front, had proved a friend in need and in deed. It was luck, unbelievable luck, Benjy and Tom having encountered him. Not a musical man but a music-loving man, with tender memories of a mother who had sung him airs from the old operas. Not a practical man but a rich man, having put, as it were, much Michigan timber in his pocket. A man in a million for a "Pinafore" company to meet just as it crumbled away under public satiety. A man in a million for Benjy to meet just as a new plan for glory was opening, flower-like, in his brain.

There was much, too, to recommend his plan, even to the practical minded. Comic opera on the road at ten, twenty and thirty cents was a profitable venture in the 'eighties. Gilbert and Sullivan, Audran and Planquette, were relished in communities much too small to attract the higher-priced companies. The rural middle west was as pleased as New York with the melodies of "Olivette" and "Mascot."

Indeed, if staunch throats could be found willing to sing through two operas a day, six days a week,

for weeks at a stretch, it was not at all surprising that audiences could be found to listen. The miracle belonged to the performers. And excellent work was done by some of these performers, too. It is doubtful whether Bunthorne in "Patience" could be presented with more waggish humor than Tom Angel gave him; or whether "The Torpedo and the Whale" could be much more deliciously sung than it was by Angel.

Nor did Benjy—trust Benjy—confine himself exclusively to these trivial pieces. Many a time was "The Marriage of Figaro" presented without a whisper of the sacredness of Mozart, and received uproariously. Many a time were "Martha" and "The Daughter of the Regiment" slipped slyly back into the repertoire. His singers were learning new operas all the time, rehearsing old ones and devising costumes. They worked mind and throat, feet and fingers, from chorus men and women to leading people.

Nor were, in those days, leading people unduly considered. Jenny Lind had the star dressing room, and when her voice, early in eighteen eighty-three, broke under the continued strain, Angel, for a few months, enjoyed possession. But aside from that distinction, few distinctions were observed. The humblest chorus member sang a rôle occasionally, when a principal was ill or forced to rest. The principals themselves were chorus members in a sense.

Except Jenny Lind, whose light voice was suffering, they all sang in the chorus when the opera of the day did not require their services; and they always gave their assistance when they chanced to be standing in the wings.

For the company was none too large, considering the demands made upon it. It numbered only twenty even after the period of reorganization in Chicago, when Benjy engaged the additional singers required. Alex's place had had to be filled. (It was months before Angel conquered her dislike for round-faced Julius Popp.) Violetta, too, had abandoned the family. She had found a berth in a small troupe which was taking Shakespeare to the tanks, a troupe the smallness of which may be gauged by the fact that Violetta, in the spring of 'eighty-three, was playing Juliet and Portia. Except for these two, all the old company of Angelos were to be found in the resuscitated troupe. The children were longer legged and assigned to small rôles now and then; Sadie and Giovanni had married in Kalamazoo; Angel and Virginie were bound together in a new and mystifying friendship. Those were the only changes.

This friendship had centered, at first, upon Alex. In the grief-torn months which had followed his disappearance—and no train leaving Detroit that night had carried him—it was upon Virginie's breast that Angel had wept out her tears. She had

clung to Virginie in an abandonment of passion which had roused all the older woman's wealth of protective maternal tenderness. Virginie had set about at once getting a divorce from Alex, but the wheels of that machinery move slowly, and she had divorced herself more completely than courts could do it in her lavish care of Angel. She had aided Angel's multiplied efforts to find him. She had joined in those plans for a halcyon future which were for a time Angel's only consolation. She had set Angel's feet on the saving path of work. Youthfully selfish, Angel had devoured this companionship with no thought of the cost in pain to Jinnie. Perhaps that was as well. In the young girl's hungry dependence Jinnie found a joy that was like a new star in her Heaven.

At the very first it was only Alex who held them, but soon they discovered another bond. They shared a reverent love for music. Most of the Angels were content with the nimble tunes of comic opera. But Benjy was not content; Fanny had not been content; and Angel was not content.

When with Virginie she began to explore the precious music of the world, she was stirred to excitement. Jinnie's thumbed and penciled scores had a positive glamor for her. Their harmonies possessed her, in sleeping and in waking hours.

Virginie, tremulous with happiness, began to teach her. They worked in hotel parlors, in empty

echoing theaters to which they went early for the sake of the stage and the piano. Virginie inaugurated also lessons in French and Italian and persisted in them faithfully over a summer and a winter of strenuous travel. Not despising comic opera, she pointed out to Angel what it had to teach—to enunciate clearly, to enter and exit gracefully, to manage hoop skirts, to weep, to laugh, to cough.

"You cough like a third-rate Camille," she informed her pupil severely.

And on the long train rides, she told Angel stories of New Orleans, of that old Creole city where opera in America was born, where she herself had sung to the glittering horseshoe.

Conspiring with Benjy, she arranged it that Angel heard good music. Angel's services were fortuitously not required if, in the city they were playing, a pianist or violinist of note was to be heard. Actually, she persuaded Benjy to route the troupe to Cincinnati for Mapleson's Musical Festival where the great Patti was singing.

Aloft in a gallery, Angel heard the diva, gone far since the day when, in ruffled pantalets, she enchanted young Dick Starr. Angel listened in the darkness with tears rolling down her cheeks. Squeezing Virginie's hand she whispered: "Can I? Can I, ever?"

"Your child can, perhaps," Virginie answered sternly.

After Patti, they worked tirelessly. Her love for Alex was of priceless value to Angel. It made her sweepingly indifferent to young men and kept her from squandering golden moments. The absent Alex was an ally of her work. For him she struggled with a shrill high F. For him she conquered the field of French irregular verbs. With the aid of her feeling for him she interpreted her rôles.

Yet she knew many hours of sadness. The world is wide when the fancy knows not what spot to select in thinking "He is there." This sadness so deepened her jewel-blue gaze, so sobered her vivid little face, that it troubled Benjy and Jinnie. When the troupe was taking a brief, enforced rest, they persuaded her to return for a holiday to Cloudman.

She found Cloudman wrapped whitely in winter. Snow billowed from the roofs of the seminary and the brewery on the crest of the highest hill down to the frozen river. And a hush, it seemed to Angel, must have fallen with the snow. The noises of the little town were muffled. Now and then a runner creaked under a heavy sled. Rarely, there came from afar a fairy tinkling of sleighbells. That was all.

From the back parlor of the John house, where the stove glowed red, but no redder than the geraniums set in the bow windows, Angel looked out on a drifted lawn, on bare trees and bending shrubs weighted down with pearl. Never, she thought, had her home looked lovelier, not when

the garden was in its August glory, not when the maples were aflame. She was very happy to be there, and her father, relaxed from his usual gravity, went about, smiling. He asked Mrs. Tinkcom half a dozen times whether she had remembered to bake crullers for Angel. He bade Angel stand up and turn around before him, and approved her kilted skirt and jersey.

"That Tincher is married. I suppose you've heard?" he said once when they were alone.

"No. I hadn't heard." A smile lifted the corners of her mouth, like an elfin dancer lifting its skirts.

"You don't mind at all, do you?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

Beside him in the jingling cutter she drove to the farm. Joe Joe and his wife were living there with the senior Angels. Joe Joe helped his father, and Hilma, in theory, helped Betsy, but her activities took another direction, Angel suspected, from the number of pale pink and pale blue bows ornamenting the baby. She found no chance to talk alone with Joe Joe, and he had little to add to the general conversation. She could see, however, that he had changed. He was working very hard, they said. He was sober, but sullen no longer. He gave her the impression of having found some hidden source of strength. Yet it was evidently not completely dependable, for when she talked of the troupe he made a pretext of the baby's stirring and went into the bedroom.

On the homeward drive, her father spoke of Joe Joe. Joseph, he said, wished he could see his way clear to send the boy to the troupe.

"Joseph feels badly about him. He has all along, but even more so since he found out about Roger."

"What about Roger, father?"

"Why, last fall Joseph came upon Roger in the barn. He was putting splints on a barn cat that had caught its leg in the door. He was doing, Joseph saw, a pretty neat job, and when his father praised him for it, he said: 'I'm glad you like it, Pa. 'Cause when I grow up I want to be a doctor.' "

Tears came into Angel's eyes.

"Dear Uncle Joseph!" she said.

"Joe Joe's a fine boy," announced her father unexpectedly, "even if he won't ever make a farmer."

In the jingling cutter, too, but this time alone, Angel drove to Mrs. Wickersham's. The gentle lady was so happy to see her that her eyes grew limpid. She had had no word of Alex—Angel knew that, for she had written from Chicago to ask her—but Angel's stories of Alex with the troupe were all new to her, and she listened with a delight which equaled Angel's delight in the telling.

What a Dick Deadeye he had made! He would win fame as a comic bass, Uncle Benjy was sure. How he had kept them all laughing, all the time! Every one had liked him, from Jenny Lind down to the children.

"And his wife. I have thought perhaps it was because of her that he went away. She was so much older."

"Yes, it was. And she sees now that they made a mistake."

"Then she doesn't blame him? She doesn't think he did wrong?"

"No, she doesn't blame him."

Angel refrained from pouring out the story. What if, in his wanderings, Alex should cease to care? But her feeling for him shone through the little recital, and at the moment of parting, Mrs. Wickersham, surprisingly, kissed her.

"I wish you'd stay to supper," she said.

But Angel refused. It was her last evening in Cloudman, and she passed it alone with her father in his study.

Hearing where she had spent the afternoon, he spoke of Alex's marriage.

"It was a damned shame for that old woman to marry him," he remarked.

"But she's getting a divorce now, father. She's doing all she can to make it right."

"And she's a special friend of yours, isn't she, Angel?" he added, smiling.

"My very dearest friend," said Angel promptly.

She told him, then, what Jinnie had done for her. Her voice warmed as she talked. She told of those hours of patient work in empty, chilly, ill-lit the-

aters. She told of the hours more expended with grammars and music books.

"You make me see," said her father slowly, when she had finished, "that I might have done more for you than just dump you on Benjy. How would you like to go away and study, Angel?"

"Not while I have Jinnie," said Angel. "I'm learning all I can take in. I wish you knew her, father."

"Maybe," he said, well pleased with himself, as he always was when he joked, "maybe they could use me in the troupe?"

"Maybe," said Angel, getting to her feet, for the clock had struck twelve, "you'll invite the troupe to come and see you?"

She leaned against his arm with that affection which, during this visit, she had been less constrained to conceal.

"Maybe," she added, "you and Uncle Joseph will fix up the old hotel as Uncle Benjy is always wishing. Wouldn't it be fun, father, if we could pass the summer here?"

"There's an idea," said her father, touching her hair.

"And Joe Joe could sing. That would please Uncle Joseph."

"There's really an idea," he repeated.

She had kissed him and was waving good-night from the doorway when he demanded suddenly:

"Angel! Do you know a song called, 'Chase the Antelope'?"

"No, father. I don't. Is it a new song?"

"No, a very old one."

"Would you like me to find it and learn it for you?"

"No! No, never mind."

XXVII

A LETTER which bore good news, bore such very good news that it was a wonder it did not glimmer through the envelope, reached Benjy in Milwaukee on a Saturday afternoon late in spring. The members of the company were already in their dressing rooms—they were singing a matinée of "Martha"—when Benjy reached the theater with his tidings. Waving the letter, shouting its contents as he went, he made the rounds.

"Angelo Troupe invited to Cloudman, Minnesota, for the summer. The former Valley House, located on the country estate of Mr. Joseph Angel, to be changed into the Valley Theater and given over to a season of opera. Special matinée performances of 'Pinafore' presented on a raft in Blue Lake. What do you think of that, eh, Angel?"

"Oh, Uncle Benjy!" Dropping a hair-pin with which she was applying black cosmetic to her lashes, Angel jumped to his arms. "Really and truly?"

"A great demand for us in Minnesota," said Benjy, picking out his lapels.

"And will Uncle Joseph let Joe Joe sing?"

"Certainly. That's the idea. And trust me to give him good rôles."

Smiles wreathed all the faces that had popped out from dressing-room doors to hear the news. The tour was to close in Chicago the following week. This disposed felicitously of the summer. And to the older Angels it meant a triumphant return. To the younger ones it meant hay-stacks to slide down and baby pigs to feed; while even the rank outsiders appreciated the prospects of country eggs and butter.

The performance opened with all in high feather. "Martha" matinées were often unduly hilarious. Angel and Jinnie enjoyed their alliance as Martha and Nancy; Tim relished a chance to sing, "Ah! So Pure!" and melt the hearts of the ladies; and everybody entered into the spirit of fun. But to-day their hilarity went out of bounds. So many irrelevant jokes were bandied back and forth, so many superfluous capers were cut, that Benjy was obliged to wave a reprimanding bow.

Fortunately, it was a school-children's matinée. The merrier the company was, the better this audience liked it. Stubby boots stamped, grimy hands clattered, round faces shone with approval. One small boy in the front row, whose smile made up in dimples for what it lacked in teeth, was so overcome with mirth at the attempts of Lionel and Plunkett to teach their maids to spin, that he rocked in his seat with his arms clasped over his stomach.

Jinnie was watching him out of the corner of one eye, delighting, by her antics, to increase his agony,

when she saw a thin wisp of smoke—smoke, that silent ghostlike terror of the theater. It was drifting, in lazy circles, over the footlights. As she looked she heard her cue to overturn her spinning wheel. She did this more violently than usual and during the resultant laughter whispered to Angel.

"Run quickly! Have the curtain rung down."

The curtain came down, but not before Jinnie had stepped out in front of it, not before a tongue of flame had shot into view and a frightened babble arisen from the house. The fire must have made considerable headway, she realized swiftly, for smoke continued to steal around the curtain. The children had turned their backs to the stage and were climbing over their seats. Some of them were crying.

Jinnie nodded to Benjy.

"Give me Buttercup," she said.

Putting his violin on a chair, he took the stool just vacated by the pianist who had ducked through the square hole leading to the musicians' room. As he started to play the introduction, Jinnie called out.

"Nothing to be afraid of, children. You in front, sit down, until those in back march out. And while we're waiting, we'll sing. You all know this song, don't you?"

It has been done in the theater a thousand times. It is always done matter-of-factly, with no assumption of heroism. Benjy banged out his introduction

briskly. Jinnie smiled at her small dimpled boy as she led the children in song.

For they sang; oh, yes, they sang lustily. The small dimpled boy had been frightened at first but now he was piping with trustful eyes on Jinnie's face:

"I'm called little Buttercup,
Dear little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why.
But th-till I'm called Buttercup,
Poor little Buttercup,
Th-weet little Buttercup, I."

They continued singing even when a ruffle of flame trimmed the side of the curtain, caught the flimsy hangings of a box, raced up to the balcony.

Jinnie's thoughts raced faster than the fire. They *must* be got safely out of the building, these children who were singing so unsuspectingly at her behest. Little Dimples, here, was in the very front row. He would be one of the last to be freed. She halted her song to cry:

"March a little faster, children. March a little faster. And you in the front may form a row while we sing.

"I've snuff and tobaccy,
And excellent jacky,
I've scissors and watches and knives."

She was throwing these treasures out of an imaginary basket. Few of the children knew the

words now, so she must work harder to hold them.

"I've ribbons and laces,
To set off the faces,
Of pretty young sweethearts and wives."

Thank God, the front lines were turning into the aisles!

"No crowding, children," she paused to warn.

"I've treacle and toffee,
I've tea and I've coffee . . ."

A great triangle of fire burst through the curtain above her head.

Benjy shouted.

"They're safe now. Jump, Jinnie dear. And here comes Tom to show us a clear way."

But as he spoke the crumpling curtain fell, and, for a moment, Jinnie was mantled in fire.

"Jump, Jinnie! Jump!" he cried.

Jinnie dropped in a heap where she stood.

It was midnight before Jinnie died. On her hospital cot, swathed in bandages, only bright suffering eyes unobscured by the wrappings of her face, she seemed more a tortured mummy than Virginie, the graceful, the mocking and gay. Tom Angel and Benjy had got her out between them, but not before the fire had done its work.

Most of her fellow troupers waited in the anteroom. Angel was permitted by her side. Almost no

words passed between them, for Angel was too near to tears for speech. Virginie, at last, articulated faintly:

"I'm—booked."

"Booked?" asked Angel gently, thinking her mind wandered.

"Booked—for New Jerusalem," said Jinnie. Angel could have sworn that the eyes smiled.

"Aren't there . . ." Jinnie struggled to speak, ". . . any reporters around?"

"Heaps of them, Jinnie. We wouldn't let them bother . . ."

"Want to—see them," announced Jinnie. "Want to—see—reporters."

As she went to call them, Angel smiled through raining tears. Wasn't it just like Jinnie, veteran actress that she was, to want a good notice in the paper even if it were the notice of her death? The same thought, a trifle more cynically held, perhaps, sat on the faces of the three young men who followed Angel back to the cot. These troupers! said their expressions, even as they bent, with awed sympathy, over her form.

"Will you—give me," panted Jinnie, "a good notice? Children—and all?"

"Yes, Ma'am," said the oldest of the three. "You certainly are deserving of a . . ."

"Not just in . . . your . . . papers! All papers. All over."

"My God!" said the youngest. "How could we *keep* it off the A.P.?"

"Want . . . it," breathed Jinnie, "to go . . . everywhere."

In sudden agonizing comprehension, Angel dropped to her knees by the bedside.

"Don't, Jinnie! Don't think of me, now," she sobbed.

The reporters looked puzzled; but Jinnie, paying no attention to Angel, fought on with what she had to say.

"Virginie Angel—French Opera, New Orleans, years ago—Buttercup with the Angelo Troupe—are you taking it down?"

Further effort was impossible for a moment. She rested, her bright suffering gaze going from one face to another.

"They'll carry it. I promise you, Madam."

"Thank . . . you," said Virginie. Her bandaged hand made a little motion as if it sought for Angel, who put her tear-wet face upon it.

XXVIII

AND so the black Angels returned to the curve of the cradled Minnesota.

They who had taken their gift of song, as a pack upon the shoulder, and peddled it joyously through that struggling country which had so needed impalpable delights; they who had dared laugh at the proverb that as he who taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart; they who had sung songs to all who would listen in lumber camps and fur-trading posts, in unfledged cities and green new towns and sober pioneering country; the black Angels returned in the summer of 'eighty-three for their reward.

A satisfying summer! And what if it were to be followed by meager winters? What if they were to know again lean purses and flat stomachs and empty houses and the railroad ties? Life does not stop when one passes its golden pinnacle, but books may be better mannered. And if we know anything at all about the Angels, we know that they didn't mind, particularly. They were happy so they were singing, and they were singing, surely, to the end.

The old hotel was patched with new bricks, and hung with bracket lamps, and upholstered flamboy-

antly in red. A raft was swung out into Blue Lake for "Pinafore." From Cloudman came in a steady stream buggies and surreys, gigs and carry-alls; from Minneapolis and St. Paul, special trains, if you please. And had the river still carried steamboats, it would doubtless have sent its quota, but the river, alas, was thin and shrunken and the railroads had put its nose out of joint.

People came even on foot, for they had a fondness for the Angels. The brothers who in their youth had worn flowers in their caps could be seen afar off by the brightness of their cravats. Jenny Lind with a curled bang was declared to look no older than Angel whose hair was cut short as a boy's—yes, in 'eighty-three—in the extreme of the mode.

Betsy, assisted by Flora, had a booth for ice cream and coffee, and before and after the performance the players mingled with the guests. It must be confessed that the Angels strutted a bit. Children in ecstasy whispered to one another: "There goes old Gaspard, the miser!" or, "I know her, even without her wig. That's Olivette!"

Joe Joe was not singing. He had, surprisingly, but with unmistakable firmness, refused to do so.

"Don't bother the old farmer. Cheese it! Cheese it; all of you!" he had laughed to persistent uncles and cousins.

To his father, alone, he had given an explanation.

"I can't do it, Pa. I couldn't stand it. It would lead me off into all sorts of things."

"But I want it to lead you, lad. Uncle David has even said that he would send you to Italy, with Angel. If he did I would look after Hilma and the baby and you could have your chance after all."

Joe Joe looked down for some moments at the toe of his muddy boot. He seemed to be, not uncertain, of his answer, but lacking strength to give it. When it came, however, it came resolutely.

"That's good of Uncle David, but if you don't mind I'll stay here. Hilma's my wife; in her own way she's a good wife. And the baby's my baby. It's my job, Pa, looking after them, and I'm going to do it." He looked up, anxiously, into his father's face. "You ought to understand how I feel, Pa. You've spent all your life looking after people."

Without speaking, and with blurred vision, Joseph gave him his hand. Joe Joe did not sing.

It proved to be true that David John would have sent Joe Joe with Angel. And he was definitely planning to send Angel. This news, noised abroad, added faggots to the fire of public interest. The curious swelled the crowd whenever she sang, which was one of the reasons for the success of the "Pinafore" matinées. On Saturday afternoons, Cloudman appeared to have been turned upside down, so empty was it of inhabitants.

That idea occurred to Alex Webb as he stepped off the train one sun-bright July Saturday.

"Why," the station agent explained, "they're giving 'Pinafore' at the Angel farm."

"They're giving . . . 'Pinafore'?"

"Yes." The agent was a newcomer to Cloudman and did not recognize the tall young man with auburn mustaches. His clothes were city clothes, the agent reflected, but he didn't seem like a traveling man; wasn't spick and span enough, somehow; dressed kind of careless like; and his face looked worried.

"Is . . . Miss Angel Angelo there?"

"Mean Angel John? Sure, she's there. She's in the show this afternoon. That's one reason why the town's so quiet."

Leaving his grip at the station, Alex walked swiftly up River Street. At the first livery stable he acquired a horse and buggy. He drove first to the Wickersham house—it wasn't too easy to do that. But there must have been a reward in going, for he looked happier when he emerged, followed as far as the carriage-stone by a joyfully tremulous lady.

Jogging out into the country, however, the troubled look came back to his face. He took off his hat and put it on the seat beside him, ran harassed fingers through his hair, dropped, now and then, his head into his hands and let the mare pick her way undisturbed along the dusty road. At the Angel farm,

he was hailed by young Roger, who was taking tickets at a fence post, but the crowd assembled on the hillside was intent upon the operetta.

The second act was in progress. Salvatore and a chubby youth whom Alex did not recognize but at once disliked, were singing:

> "Kind Captain, I've important information—
> Sing hey, the gallant captain that you are—
> About a certain intimate relation,
> Sing hey, the merry maiden and the tar."

They were forward on the raft, the back end of which was screened from view. Around them, to distant wooded banks, the waters of Blue Lake sparkled in the sunshine.

Momentarily, Alex was lured into enjoyment, but when Josephine tiptoed forward with her little bundle of necessaries, he jumped up and strode away, to the great annoyance of his bench-mates. From the shelter of a butternut tree on the crest of the hill he listened to what sounded an unbearable cacophony. At last, came the final chorus, and the youngest Angel cousins, with fitting verve, rushed the curtains together.

Presenting himself at the raft dressing room, he was greeted with heartening enthusiasm.

"Alex!—Alex!—Benjy, Tom!—It's Alex!"

Both his hands were clasped at once, while the children threw themselves upon him, and Dora,

Nuncy, and Jenny Lind embraced him with kisses. Above their heads he saw Angel come out between the curtains. Her braids were gone! He rather liked that gallant, close-cropped head. She was dressed simply, in a jersey. Her slight figure swam in radiance.

Angel gave him her hand. It was a very cold hand. He dropped it almost instantly and continued talking to the others. But when she turned away he broke off in the middle of a sentence and bolted after her.

"Angel! Can't we go somewhere and talk?"

"Of course. Anywhere you like."

"The bank there is full of people I know."

"We might," she offered, smiling with pale lips, "swim out into the lake?"

"We might steal this boat," he said. He commenced untying it.

"That's Joe Joe's," she protested.

"He won't mind," said Alex and added, unconsciously using the phrase so often spoken by the troupe at mention of Joe Joe's father. "Good old Joe."

With short, powerful strokes he propelled them swiftly to the center of the lake. He paused there and Angel dabbled her hand in the water. The sky was a peach yellow with the endings of sunset. Laughter from the farm came to them faintly.

"You are going to Italy, I hear," Alex was somber.

After a brief hesitation, Angel said, "Yes."

"You're quitting comic opera?"

"I don't know. I want to. I've grown . . . very ambitious, Alex. Jinnie sort of took me in hand after you left."

He said nothing and Angel, swallowing an obstacle in her throat, went on, "I want you to know about Jinnie. She was . . . wonderful to me. She worked with me, helped me in every way. She gave me a new ideal of music.

"I may be," Angel continued after a moment, "too old. I may not be able to do much myself. But I can learn. My children won't be as ignorant as I am."

After a pause, she asked timidly, "What have you been doing, Alex?"

"Andrews' Opera Company; Bennett and Moulton's. Under another name, of course. I've gotten on pretty well. Saved a little money."

"Maybe," said Angel, but warily, "you'll be studying, too? And there are lots of opera troupes in Italy."

Then, out of his silence, which had darkened as the sky was darkening, he offered violently.

"I feel beastly about Jinnie. I read it in the newspapers . . . and how she wanted her name used. I knew why that was, of course. I don't know just where I've been rotten, but I must have been, or I wouldn't feel like this."

Angel steadied her voice.

"Do you still love me, Alex?"

"Do I . . ."

"Do you still love me? Tell me—I can bear it if you don't."

"Angel!" cried Alex, and he was perilously on his knees in the boat, crushing her hands against his cheeks and lips, reaching up to take her in his arms.

Sky and water were black, except for an opulent moon rising in a trail of silver glory when Alex directed the boat back toward the landing.

"That's what Jinnie would want us to do," Angel was saying, happily. "Get our experience over there, in the Italian companies."

"I hope," broached Alex, "your father won't mind my tagging along."

"He won't," Angel answered. He would, she perceived with helpless regret, be a little dismayed, at first, since Alex would seem an additional obstacle set up by music between him and his daughter. But music had set up so many obstacles that he had, she knew, become resigned. He and Joseph and Joe Joe—all three were the resigned pitch pipes which the Muse gave to the Fannys and Benjys, to sound upon well or ill—the improvident, demanding, lovable Fannys and Benjys and—yes—Angels. But perhaps she could be less improvident and demanding.

"No," she repeated, "he won't. He'll mind our leaving. But of course we will come back to Minnesota."

"Of course," said Alex. "Angelo will début here."

"Angelo?" puzzled Angel, then stopped and pulled away from her precarious position beside him on the seat.

"Angelo Webbo!"

"Silly!" said Angel. "We dock by that red lantern."

THE END

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